

The Choices She Makes

by SparksJSH

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Summary: Tommy learns the reason behind the letter.

1. The Choices She Makes

> <meta name="Generator"> Disclaimer: Saban owns the Rangers

Disclaimer: Saban owns the Rangers. I am making no money off this. If I were, I wouldn't be depressed that the summer is half over and I am about to have to go back to work.

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**Author's Note:** Except for the prologue this story takes place after the power transfer. For the purpose of this story, please pretend that Kim was not in the Turbo movie. I rate this fic a PG-13. There is nothing graphic but I prefer to be safe than sorry.

The Choices She Makes
> by: Jennifer Hart<h3>

Kimberly wiped a tear from her eye as she dropped the letter into the mail chute. She was glad she wouldn't be there to see Tommy's face when he read the words she had spent all afternoon and evening putting down on paper. "I'm sorry, Tommy. I wish there could be some other way but this is the only way I can be really fair to you. Maybe one day you'll forgive me."

She stepped back into her hotel room and immediately checked the space formed by the four pillows strategically placed on the spare bed. The blue clad bundle hadn't moved in the time it had taken her to mail the letter that would irrevocably end any chance of she and Tommy being together.

The infant let out a whimper of displeasure. With a sigh, Kim carefully scooped the baby up in her arms and held him close. "Shh,

it'll be okay, Drew." She reached for the bottle she had left on the night stand and gently teased his lips with it until he latched on contentedly.

"It's not fair, is it? You have no idea what kind of trouble your birth has stirred up. You aren't to blame, though. You just want to be loved and cared for. I don't know anything about being a mom but I promise you I'll do my best. I don't have any other choice in the matter. You and I are all the other has left in the world now."

"Not necessarily."

Kim whirled around, fear in her eyes. "Trent, what...? How...?"

"I went by the clinic and Dr. Myers told me you left sometime in the middle of the night. I knew you couldn't get far so I started searching the hotels. Kimber, you shouldn't have left. I told you last week that we would work something out together. You aren't in this alone. Raising a baby is tough enough when there are two people to love and care for the child; to do it alone is even worse. You shouldn't have to face it alone."

"Why should you have to give up everything? That is exactly why I just broke up with Tommy. Because of this baby, my life, my dreams are gone forever. It's my choice to do that but I can't ask anyone else to do the same. It's not your problem."

"The Hell it isn't, Kim. You may have delivered Drew and promised to raise him but he's part of me. He's family. I can't turn my back on him. I owe it to him to be there for him no matter what the sacrifice."

Tears coursed her cheeks and the hand holding the bottle was trembling. "This isn't fair. This shouldn't be happening."

"You're right, it shouldn't. And it's my fault that it is. I have to do this to make up for my part in all this. I know you don't love me. Your heart belongs to Tommy, no matter what you said in order to break up with him. After what I did, I don't even know if we can be friends. I wouldn't blame you if you hated me as much as I hate myself."

"I don't hate you, Trent. I never should have told you I did last week. You didn't know any of this would happen."

"Thank you for that." Trent's voice was thick with emotion. "I want to help you raise Drew. I'm not expecting anything more from you than for you to allow me to do that. He's the only family I have left."

Removing the nipple from the baby's mouth, Kim set the bottle aside and wiped away the tears that poured from her cheeks. She repositioned the baby to her shoulder to burp him but the action sent a twinge of pain across her abdomen, especially around her stitches. Trent saw her wince and took Drew from her and raised him to his shoulder.

"Both of you should still be at the clinic. You haven't healed yet. Like it or not, you need me. I can promise you I won't betray you

again. Will you trust me?"

Kim picked up one of the pillows and hugged it to her body. She thought of Tommy and how much she loved him. She had dreamed of becoming his wife and the mother of his children. How could things have gone so differently from that?

"You're right. You deserve to be a part of Drew's life. I have no right to deny you that." She took a deep breath. "Like it or not. I can't do this alone. I do need help."

Trent supported the tiny infant with one arm and caressed her cheek softly with the other. "Thank you, Kim. I promise you, Angel, I won't give you any reason to regret this."

**

Chapter One

**—

Two years later

Tommy Oliver pulled his car into the pit area that had been assigned to him. He frowned. He knew his timing was way off again today. He even knew why it was off. But unfortunately, he didn't know the most important thing: what to do about it.

Climbing out of the car, Tommy tossed his helmet onto a bench and picked up his duffel bag. He rummaged through the bag and pulled out a picture and a well worn letter. The picture had been taken almost three years ago, right before Kim had left Angel Grove for Florida; nine months before he had received the now well worn letter in his hand.

"Why, Kim? Why did you send a letter? Why couldn't you at least come home and talk to me about it. It still would have hurt but I would have let you go. I only want you to be happy."

"Hey, Oliver, you've got company."

He stuffed the photograph and letter back into his bag and turned excitedly, half expecting to miraculously see Kimberly Hart standing there. He frowned when he instead found Rocky DeSantos and Jason Scott standing there. Just as quickly, he covered up his disappointment and enthusiastically greeted his two friends.

"Jase, Rocko, what are you two doing here?"

Jason smiled. "This has been the closest you've been to Angel Grove since the circuit started. We didn't want to miss seeing you race."

"Not to mention, we want to take every opportunity we can to convince you to buy into Red Dragon Dojo. We even kept you in mind when we named it so it would fit you too." Rocky looked around innocently. The three former rangers understood the significance of the name; all three had been Red Rangers and all three had commanded powerful Dragon Zords.

"I'm thinking about it. Once the circuit is over, I should hopefully have enough money to do just that. Man, it's good to see both of you. Rocky, Jason, I take it you met Trent?"

The tall muscular guy smiled and held his hand out. "Not officially. I'm Trent Connerey. You guys talk him into joining you as quickly as you can. The sooner he's out of here, the sooner I can make more money from winning races."

Tommy laughed good-naturedly. "Don't let him fool you. Trent here is probably one of the best. Say, why don't we all go grab lunch together."

"Sounds great to me, but then again, when do I ever turn down food?" Rocky smiled broadly.

"I'm going to pass." Trent begged off. "I have to pick up an Angel at the airport. My fiancée is flying in this afternoon."

Tommy nodded. He had heard Trent mention his fiancée several times but didn't know much about her. He did know that Trent was crazy about her and had missed her terribly. "Hey, that's great, Man. How long has it been?"

"Two long grueling months. I haven't seen her since I flew home for her spring break back in March." To Jason and Rocky, he explained. "Kimber is in college so she can't tour with me. But her classes ended yesterday and she was scheduled for the first available flight. We are spending the entire summer together."

"Two months, huh?" Jason shook his head. "That's a long time. No wonder you look so happy."

"You know it, Man. Look I hate to run but I've got to get to the airport. Jason, Rocky, it was nice meeting you. I hope I see you again before you leave. Tommy, I'll make sure to bring Kimber around tomorrow. I can't wait for you to meet her."

With a friendly wave, Trent continued on. Rocky watched him leave. "He seems like a really nice guy."

"He is. He's usually a little more reserved around strangers, though. I guess he's really excited about seeing his fiance again."

Jason shook his head. "Can't say I blame him. I can't imagine going two months without seeing Emily. Being gone this week is going to be hard enough."

Tommy said nothing but glanced back at the duffel bag he had stuffed Kim's picture and letter in. There was a time he couldn't have imagined going a day without at least talking to Kim on the phone. But last month had marked the two year anniversary of his receiving the letter that ended things between them. It was the last he had heard anything from her.

Despite the pain the letter had caused him, he had never gotten over her. For awhile he had convinced himself that he had. He had even dated Kat while they had been rangers. She made him forget the pain and made him laugh again. But after they had relinquished their powers they had decided to just be friends. He still talked to her

every so often. After she had left the country however, the pain he had felt the day he received Kim's letter resurfaced just as fresh as before. He wondered briefly what she was doing right now. Was she happy with the choice she had made? He wished he was.

Jason shot Rocky a knowing look and reached out and gripped his friend's shoulder. 'Maybe you should give her a call."

He didn't have to say her name; all three boys knew who he was referring to. Tommy shook his head. "I tried. Several months ago I called the training center. She wasn't there and I couldn't get anyone who even remembered her. Coach Schmidt has retired so there was no help there either."

"What about her mom?" Rocky frowned. It wasn't like Kim to disappear without a trace like that; but then again he seemed to remember thinking it wasn't like Kim to break up with Tommy via a letter either.

"No luck. Kim's sent her the occasional letter but never with a return address. She's worried but doesn't know what to do."

"Kim's a strong person. She can take care of herself. I'm sure she's fine." Jason meant to assure him but the lack of confidence in his voice didn't ease Tommy's fears at all.

* * *

Kim Hart stepped through the air tunnel pushing the umbrella stroller in front of her. A large diaper bag was slung over her shoulder. Her right wrist was encased in a flexible brace and a large bruise covered her right eye and cheek. Those were her only visible injuries but her ribs twinged in protest with every step she took.

"Kim!"

She smiled as Trent's voice carried across the airport. She waved him over with her unbandaged arm. He smiled when he saw her but the smile turned to a frown of concern when he saw her injuries. He tenderly wrapped his arms around her and kissed her uninjured cheek. "What happened, Angel? Who did this to you?"

"Not here. I'll tell you everything when we get to the trailer."

"Dada." The toddler in the stroller squealed with glee. With another worried glance at her, he reluctantly turned his attention to the small boy.

"Hey, Slugger. Man, I've missed you." He looked back at Kim, concern all to evident in his eyes. He wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her close. "I've missed you too, Angel."

Kim smiled, her eyes bright with unshed tears. She rested her head on his chest. "This has been the longest two months of my life. I am so glad school is out and we have the whole summer together."

Trent smiled and kissed her softly on the lips. "Same here, Angel, same here. Come on, let's get your bags and go home."

Kim was glad to have Trent to lean on as they walked toward the luggage carousel. The last two months had been extremely hard, especially the last two weeks. For the first time in two weeks, she didn't feel the need to look over her shoulder.

Kim watched for her bags as Trent tried to return the toddler to the stroller. Drew protested loudly. Finally, Kim frowned. "Hand him here, Trent." She took him from the tall muscular boy but couldn't hide the grimace of pain the boy's twenty pound frame on her ribs forced on her face. Trent noticed immediately.

"What's wrong, Kimber?"

"It's nothing, Trent. I promise, I'll tell you everything later."

"It's your ribs, isn't it? Come on, Angel, if you are hurt, you don't need to be carrying him. Let me put him in the stroller."

"I don't want to listen to him scream all over the airport. I've been carrying him all his life; somebody had to and I am usually the only one around to do it. Why should that change just because I'm hurt?" She immediately regretted the words but couldn't take them back.

Trent hung his head. "Don't do that, Kim. We've gone over this so many times. I had to go on the racing circuit in order to pay the bills. You know I didn't want to leave you for so long."

Drew, sensing the tension began to whimper again. Kim shushed him quietly and gently forced his head down onto her shoulder. A single tear fell from her eye. "I know. I'm sorry. You didn't have a choice in the matter, but neither have I."

Trent kissed the tear away and took Drew from her. "Well, now you do." He reached around her into the bag and pulled out a pacifier which he plucked into Drew's mouth as soon as he put him in the stroller.

By that time, Kim's bags came into view. Trent grabbed the large soft suitcase and set it next to them. He grabbed the smaller tote and the car seat at the same time. "You okay to push him?"

She nodded and hung her head. She pressed herself up against him. "I'm sorry, Trent. I don't want us to fight. It's just a lot has happened and I've been on edge for too long. I guess I'm tired of being strong."

Kissing the bridge of her nose, Trent let his forehead rest on hers. "Don't apologize. Everything's going to be fine now. As soon as we get to the trailer, we'll get Drew settled and you and I can cuddle on the couch. I'll be the strong one and for once you can be as weak as you want to be."

* * *

"Here ya go, Angel." Trent handed her the glass of lemonade before sitting beside her on the couch. He pulled her close and wrapped his arms tenderly around her.

She smiled and rested her head on his chest. "Thanks. Drew down for the count?"

"Yep, he was worn out from the flight. Looks like you are too. Okay, Kimber, what happened?"

Kim imperceptibly stiffened. "Donavon happened. Two weeks ago, he showed up at the gym. Luckily there were a lot of people around so he couldn't do anything more than make veiled threats. I was so scared, I almost packed us up and took off right then. But I knew missing exams would have meant wasting all that money for school."

Trent tightened his grip on her. The thought of Donavon Black being anywhere near Kim or Drew was enough to frighten him. "You should have called me, Angel. I would have flown home."

Kim shook her head. "No, you had too many races that you would have missed. I was careful, or at least I thought I was. A week ago, I was leaving the apartment to go to work. Luckily I had an exam that morning so Drew was already at the daycare. I was in the parking garage when someone pulled me into the shadows and began to beat me. By the time he was through, my wrist was sprained and I had two cracked ribs. Not to mention that there is scarcely a spot on my body that isn't bruised. A couple came into the garage and scared him off. They called the police and an ambulance."

Trent buried his head in her hair, tears welling up in his eyes too. "Donavon?"

Kim nodded slightly. She placed the glass on the coffee table and stifled a yawn. "It was too dark to see him and he didn't speak but yeah, it was him. The police think it was just a mugging. I couldn't tell them anything else because it would open a whole can of worms."

"'Oh what tangled webs we weave, when first we practice to deceive.' I am so glad you are here, Kim. I can't stand the idea you were there where he could hurt you and I wasn't there to protect you. I promise you, I won't let him hurt you again."

Kim didn't answer. Twisting so he could look at her face, he smiled. Safe in his arms, she had fallen asleep. He kissed the top of her head. He could just imagine just how little sleep she had gotten since Donavon had shown up.

He could see her pacing around the apartment most of the night, checking on Drew every thirty minutes. She probably had put all of her own personal needs on hold in order to do well on her exams; work at the gym, and take care of the apartment and Drew. He eased her legs up on the couch where she could sleep comfortably. He had meant what he had told her at the airport. Now that she was here, he would be the strong one. He would do anything to protect her.

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Chapter Two

**

"Mama."

Kim's eyes fluttered. She tried to bury her head deeper into the strong chest she was using as a pillow. For the first time in who knew how long, she felt safe and comfortable. She didn't want the feeling to end.

"Mama." The babyish voice grew more insistent. A small chubby hand patted her bruised cheek. Kim groaned and opened her eyes. Strong arms tightened their loving embrace around her as she shifted position. Kim smiled.

"Mama's awake, Slugger, but I don't think Daddy is." She eased out of his arms and swung the little boy up in her arms. She winced with the pain but pushed it from her mind.

"Dada." The two year old stared at Trent, his eyes wide with wonder. Kim knew the two months had been even harder on the toddler who couldn't understand why his dada wasn't around. Kim hugged him tighter.

'That's right, Slugger. Get used to him because he's going to be around for a long time now.' She carried him into the bedroom and set him on the floor before grabbing the black tote of his toys.

Once he was happily playing, Kim began unpacking. Two years ago, she would have never believed she could have gone somewhere for a week with as little baggage as she had brought for the whole summer. Even though the one suitcase she had brought with her was large, more than a third of the contents were Drew's things.

Placing her make-up bag on the dresser, she studied herself in the mirror. Her hair was the same caramel color it had always been but she had long since given up worrying about bad hair days. If her hair didn't do what she wanted on the first or second try, she would shrug it off and settle for an old reliable ponytail. Her eyes looked older too, with dark circles that almost permanently lived under her eyes.

She wondered if her old friends would even recognize her now. She by far was not the same person she had been when she left Angel Grove. Gone was the somewhat flighty, sometimes materialistic shopaholic that had given up her Pink Ranger Powers. In her place was a mature, responsible, she bit her lip, mother.

"Hey, Angel. I meant to be awake when he got up. You deserve the rest."

She smiled, looking at him through the mirror. "Yeah, well, our pint size bundle of energy can be quite insistent when he wants to be. I didn't mean to fall asleep like that."

"Don't worry about it. I like having a beautiful woman fall asleep in my arms."

"Dada, ball." That was all the warning Drew gave before tossing a foam ball at Trent. He looked at the boy in surprise. Kim couldn't suppress a giggle and soon Drew joined in on the laughing. She scooped him up in her arms, set him on the bed and tickled his stomach.

"Sorry, Trent. I should have warned you that he's been improving his aim. Anything round is a ball no matter how heavy or fragile it may be."

"I'll keep that in mind." Trent crossed the tiny room to sit beside them on the bed. He wrapped his arms around Kim and pulled them both close. "Have I told you how glad I am that you are here?"

Kim allowed Drew to slip out of her lap where he returned to his toys. Looking up into Trent's eyes, she felt her heartbeat quicken. She chewed her bottom lip for a second before answering him. "As glad as I am to be here. I never knew how lonely I could be with a rambunctious toddler around."

Trent traced the bruise around her eye with his fingertip. "When I think about what he did to you; what he could have done... Angel, I just want to take you in my arms and never let you go."

Kim snuggled in closer to him. "I may be tempted to let you down. But I don't want to talk about Donavon anymore. He's not going to find us here. If I have to in the fall I'll transfer to another college and have my records sealed. He's not going to hurt us anymore."

"He shouldn't have hurt you this time. I feel like I let you down, Angel. I promised you when we started out that I wouldn't let you get hurt again. Now look, I failed you again."

She took his face in her hands and made him look her in the eye. "Trent, if you had been there, he would have known something was going on and he would have killed us both. Then who would be there for Drew? The bruises will fade and my wrist and ribs will heal. Long before summer is over my injuries will be dim memories."

"I never thought I would see the day when you would look at me this way. How did I get so lucky?"

"I'm the lucky one. Unfortunately, as much as I love sitting here in your arms, I need to see about preparing supper. Drew is going to be protesting soon."

"I could go pick something up. I don't want you to have to go to any trouble. Better yet, why don't I take Drew with me to the supermarket and I'll pick up some meat and all the fixings to grill hamburgers."

Kim laughed. "You are going to take him shopping?"

"You do it."

"Yeah, that's why I've reformed from my days as a shopaholic."

Trent looked down at the energetic toddler. "Come on, he can't be that bad. Just think, you can finish settling in without worrying about him. Take another nap. Anything you want to do, you can without a thought about what Drew may be into. Let me take care of him for a few hours. The two of us guys need the bonding time and you could use a 'mommy-free' evening."

"Ooh, when you put it like that, how can I say no?"

Trent brushed his lips with his own and grinned. "You can't. I love you, Kimberly Ann Hart."

"Love you too." She returned his light brush of a kiss with a more affectionate one of her own.

With a slight growl of pleasure Trent broke off the kiss and swung Drew up in his arms. "Tell Mama to have fun."

"Mama." Drew leaned toward her with his mouth wide open and rewarded her with a sloppy kiss of his own.

"Behave Slugger. Don't wear Dada out too quickly. Trent keep him away from the tomatoes."

Trent frowned. "Why?"

Kim wrinkled her nose as she remembered the last time she had turned her back on him in the grocery store with a tomato in the basket. She giggled at the memory of the look on the sales clerks face when the tomato splattered on the front of his apron. "Think about it, Trent. What does a tomato look like?"

Trent remembered what she had said about Drew and balls and had a mental image of what she was talking about. He laughed. "That's my boy."

"Don't you dare go encouraging him, Trent Aaron Connerey!"

"Say 'bye, Mama.'" Trent blew her kiss as he left out.

For a moment after they left, Kim sat in the blessed silence. But then the silence grew too heavy and she missed Drew being there. She turned on the radio to drown out the silence and began to finish unpacking.

When everything was put away, she decided to use the remaining free time to finish her nap. Sleep had been a precious commodity recently. One she couldn't afford to indulge in for long periods of time. In no time at all she was stretched out on the bed, a pillow snuggled close to simulate a toddler, and fell asleep.

* * *

"Mama." Drew called out happily as they entered the trailer. Trent wearily looked around for Kim but didn't see her. He set the toddler on the floor and turned back to go get the bags of groceries. He now knew why Kim had been dubious about him taking Drew to the store. He had no idea how much of a handful a toddler could be from the safe confines of a buggy. As soon as his small chubby feet touched the floor, Drew toddled off toward the bedroom.

"Mama."

Trent followed him and smiled when he saw Kim sprawled out on the bed in blissful sleep. He scooped Drew back up before the two year old could attempt to climb up on the bed with her and wake her up. With his free hand he shoveled the toys into the bag and carried it and Drew back to the living room. He deposited the toys and toddler on

the floor and firmly closed the bedroom door to prevent Drew from re-entering. He then went back to unloading the groceries.

He was just about ready to throw the burgers on the grill when Kim screamed. Fear pounding in his heart, he rushed into the bedroom. Kim was still asleep but was tossing and turning, obviously in the throes of a nightmare. Her body arched as if in pain and she began to whimper.

Tenderly he gathered her up in his arms and held her close. He gently rubbed circles on her back and rocked with her. "Wake up, Kim. Please, Angel, wake up. It's all right; it's just a dream."

"No, no, Tommy please, no, not Tommy. I'm sorry. Please." Kim continued to whimper, locked solidly in the dream.

Her words cut to his soul. He hadn't heard her call out to Tommy in over a year. He shook her a little, trying to wake her up. "Please, Kimber. Wake up, Angel."

Her eyes opened slowly and she looked around wildly. Seeing that Trent was holding her, she clung to him as she began to cry. For a moment, he just held her and let her sob into his shoulder.

"Mama?" Drew pulled himself up on the bed and stuck his face close to hers. With all the childlike innocence that a two year old could possess, he kissed her and patted her cheek. Still holding on tightly to Trent with one arm, she gathered the toddler close with the other.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't be carrying on like this."

Trent kissed the top of her head. "Don't apologize, Angel. That must have been some dream. Want to talk about it?"

Kim shuddered. "Not right now. Later, okay?"

"Okay, whenever you are ready. You're soaked with sweat. Why don't you go take a shower and freshen up. Drew and I will finish getting supper ready."

Kim took a shaky breath and nodded. "Yeah, that sounds great. Thanks."

As he started to rise taking Drew with him, Kim reached out and grabbed his shirt and pulled him close. She kissed him. "Thank you."

"For what?" His eyes revealed his genuine puzzlement.

"For everything. For being there for me. For not giving up on me when I treated you like dirt. For believing that I could be a good mom when I couldn't see it for myself. Like I said, for everything."

"Oh." He blushed deeply. "Then for all that you are welcome. And I thank you for giving us a chance." He nudged her nose with his own and then straightened.

* * *

Kim sighed contentedly as she pushed back from her plate. "That was great. I couldn't eat another bite if you force fed it to me."

"There's pie in the refrigerator for dessert." He grinned as she wrestled with the temptation.

"Maybe in a little bit. I am really stuffed."

"I aim to please, milady. Looks like Drew enjoyed it as well."

Kim smiled and ruffled the two year old's hair. "Like you, he's a burger boy. Although right now Messy Boy might be more appropriate. I'll do the dishes if you'll bathe him."

Trent could imagine the pain bending over the tiny bath would cause her and readily agreed. Besides, he hated doing the dishes and she knew it. He scooped up the two year old and disappeared into the bathroom. Kim waited until they were out of sight before standing to clear the table. How nice it felt to be able to share the duties again.

She was glad Trent hadn't mentioned the nightmare again. She hadn't experienced such a mind numbing terrifying dream in over a year. She knew she had Donavon's arrival two weeks ago to thank for it. She hoped the dream wasn't a signal that her nightly demons were about to launch an all out assault on her dreams again.

She had just rinsed of the last plate and set it in the drainboard when a wail of fear and indignation rose up from the bathroom. Without a second thought, she raced into the bathroom. Trent was standing with a naked soaking wet Drew cuddled tight to his chest. Trent's face was white with fear and Drew was crying wildly. One quick swift glance assured her there was no blood and no obvious injuries.

"I didn't realize how slippery he'd be when he was wet. I was trying to pick him up but he went right through my hands. I caught his head before it hit the tub but not before his face went under water."

For a second Kim just stared at then and then to his surprise she started to laugh. He looked at her, shocked, until he realized Drew had quit crying was giggling as well. With difficulty, Kim finally composed herself and picked up a towel. She wrapped the towel around the two year old's wet body and transferred him to her arms.

"I'm sorry, Trent, but the look on your face. Don't worry, I was the same way when it first happened to me. He's okay, Trent, it just startled him. I don't know who was scared worse, you or Drew."

"I can't believe he's happy now. How did you do that?"

"A trick I've picked up as he's learned how to fall down a lot. If he's not hurt, he's less likely to cry if you laugh it off. He takes his cue from how you react to things." She kissed him softly on the lips. "How about I finish this up while you get your heart rate back to normal. Besides that you're shirt is soaked. Go on. I've got him."

Trent nodded and watched her carry the small boy back into the bedroom where she began drying him off and dressing him. He grabbed a new shirt from the drawer and listened as she talked to the toddler in a nonsensical way. He watched in fascination as she expertly dried him off and dressed him with ease. It brought to mind a memory of a time two years ago when Drew was only a few weeks old.

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Trent rolled over in bed and glanced at the clock. Thirty straight minutes, that's how long Drew had been crying nonstop. He wondered if he should step across the hall and check on Kim. Her nerves were already frazzled and worn thin and her ego had taken a severe beating as she struggled to learn her new role as mother.

After ten more minutes of listening to the crying, Trent sat up and grabbed his pajama bottoms and slipped them on. He knocked softly on her bedroom door. "Kim?"

"Go back to bed, Trent. I'm sorry, I'll get him settled down in a minute." Her voice was tight and it was obvious she was struggling not to cry herself.

"You sure, Angel? I don't mind taking my turn."

"I said I've got it."

He doubted it; her voice told him she was barely holding herself together. But he knew she would never admit it and would resent him even more if he barged in and took over. He couldn't bring himself to leave her totally alone, however. Instead of returning to his bedroom, he sank to the floor against the wall and waited.

More than an hour passed and still Drew was screaming. Trent burned with the urge to go in and help her but still he refrained. However, when her own desperate sobs joined the infant's, he was on his feet instantly, throwing open the door without knocking.

In the dark room, he didn't see her at first. He switched on a lamp and bathed the room in soft light. His heart broke. Drew was lying on Kim's bed still screaming. Kim was crouched in a corner, knees drawn up to her chest and head buried, sobbing just as hard. He was torn by who to comfort first. Finally he lifted Drew up and placed him high on his shoulder and began to alternately pat and rub his back.

"What's the matter, Slugger? Got a bad old tummyache? Go on and burp it all up then. That's right, make me proud."

And that's what Drew did. The burp was loud and Trent felt something wet run down his bare shoulder. But it was apparently exactly what was wrong because the tiny infant instantly became quiet. A few minutes later, he was sound asleep. Trent returned him to the small crib and took just a minute to wipe his shoulder off with a cloth diaper before turning his attention to Kim.

He had hoped Drew's silence would quiet her sobs but if anything it made her worse. He knelt beside her and tried to gather her up in his arms. She pushed him away. "Kim, Angel, it's okay. Shh, relax Angel,

he's asleep now. Please, Kimber."

"Why didn't he do that for me? I tried burping him, changing him, feeding him. I tried everything but he wouldn't stop crying. He hates me. He knows that I don't know what I'm doing. I can't do anything right. I'm no mother."

Despite her protests, Trent picked her up bodily and carried her to the bed. Sitting down, he rocked back and forth with her. He wanted to reassure her but didn't know the word to say that would do that. So he held her. Rocking her gently, he rubbed circles in her back.

As her sobs slowly tuned to hiccups, her body began to relax in his arms. Some dim corner of his mind screamed at him, warning him that it was crazy for him to be sitting there in just his pajama bottoms holding her wearing a pink, soft cotton, short nightie. But that was the part he had tucked away in the deepest regions of his mind where all forbidden dreams and fantasies are sent. It was the part of him that had fallen in love with her at first sight.

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Even now he ignored the subtle warning. Even if he had to spend hours under a cold shower, he would not abandon Kim when she was most vulnerable. Somehow he would convince her that Drew did not hate her. Convince her that nobody knew what they were doing when it came to taking care of a newborn for the first time. But most of all he would convince her that she was a mother, the only mother Drew would ever know.

"Trent?"

Kim's soft voice broke through his reverie. He smiled at her. She had finished dressing Drew and was now rocking him back and forth trying to put him to sleep. He could tell the motion was hurting his ribs. "Let me take him."

Drew started singing to himself. Kim smiled and kissed his head. She had done this often enough to know that the sweet singsong signaled that he was just about to drop off to sleep. "He's just about gone. Where were you at? Your mind certainly wasn't here in the room with us."

"Just remembering how worried you were about being good at being a mom. Sorry I wiggled out on you in the bathroom earlier."

Kim's eyes twinkled. "Look, that was minor compared to some of my wig outs the past two years. Why don't you go cut that pie. I'll be out in just a minute."

Once she was sure Drew was good and out, she twisted on the bed and maneuvered him under the covers. She kissed him and tucked his favorite bear into his small arms. For just a second, she watched him sleep, awed as always by his sweet innocence.

In the living room, Trent had already cut one large slice of chocolate pie and poured a large glass of milk. Seeing Kim come out of the bedroom he motioned her to join him on the couch. She snuggled up by him and looked at the goodies. "Only one of each?"

"I thought we could share."

A shiver ran up her spine as he alternately fed her and then himself a bite of pie. When the last of the slice had been demolished, Kim stretched up and kissed the whip cream from around his mouth. In sweet retaliation, Trent ran his finger across the plate, picking up the extra whip cream. He smeared it on her face and proceeded to kiss it right back off.

This sent Kim into an explosion of giggles as she finally pushed away from him. "You are so bad, Trent Connerey."

"Ah, but you aren't upset by it. You didn't use my middle name. Besides, you started it."

"Yeah, I did, didn't I? Okay, shame on me." She snuggled back close to him. It was times like this that she had missed most by their separation. Times when Drew was asleep and they were alone and unsupervised. These were the times that bonded them as a couple more than anything else could.

"Kim?" Trent spoke hesitantly, all traces of laughter gone.

"Hmm?"

"This afternoon when you were having that nightmare, you called out Tommy's name."

Kim bit her lower lip and looked away from him. His chest was directly under her ear and she could hear his heartbeat quicken. "I did?"

"Yeah. I didn't know you still dreamed about him."

"I haven't been. This afternoon was the first time in over a year."

"You sounded scared for him."

Kim's eyes widened and she twisted so she could look up at him. 'No, oh no, Trent. It wasn't like that at all. In my dream, Donavon had tricked Tommy into helping him. I wasn't scared for him but of him.' A single tear ran down her cheek.

Trent wiped it tenderly away. "I'm sorry, Angel. I didn't mean to upset you."

Kim sniffed. "You didn't. It's just that the dream made me remember how badly I probably hurt Tommy with that letter."

"Maybe you should call him or go visit him. Explain to him now what you couldn't explain two years ago."

"No. He's probably forgotten all about me by now. I wouldn't want to hurt him all over again. Not to mention, I still can't tell him everything. It's better this way, Trent."

Trent leaned down and kissed her. "I don't want to see you hurt, not even in your dreams. I can't wait until we are married and I can hold

you safe every night."

Her own heartbeat quickened. "You don't have to wait for the wedding for that, honey."

Trent's eyes widened in surprise. He stared at her incredulously. "Kim, what are you suggesting?"

"That you hold me all night. Nothing is going to happen with Drew in the bed with us and I really feel like I would sleep better knowing you were there."

Trent was reluctant at first. He still wasn't sure if Tommy's presence in her dreams meant more than even Kim realized. As much as he wanted to keep Kim's demons at bay, he wasn't sure if it was right to share a bed with her even without sex if he wasn't sure.

Kim stroked his face and looked straight in his eyes. She could read the pain and doubt that rested there. "I love you, Trent. No matter who I loved before or how long it took me to see it, you are the man that I love. I thought I had made that clear when I agreed to marry you."

She held up her left hand where a small, simple engagement ring encircled her second finger. "I haven't had a moment's doubt about marrying you since the day you slid this ring on my finger. Never doubt that."

Trent leaned down and kissed her. "I trust you, Angel. I just don't want you to regret it in the morning."

"What is there to regret, Trent? I'm asking to fall asleep in your arms just like I did this afternoon. We've taken plenty of naps in each other's arms. How different could it be when it's the whole night? I've been fighting demon dreams for so long and I've been fighting them alone. I don't want to fight them tonight. I don't have the strength to face them alone. Will you fight them for me?"

"When you ask like that, how can I say no?"

She grinned, remembering a similar exchange earlier that afternoon. "You can't."

**

Chapter Three

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"No way, Rocky. There is no way I'm letting you behind the wheel of my race car."

Rocky DeSantos pouted good-naturedly. "This is really not fair. I don't get the chance to drive any of the Turbo Zords and now you won't let me drive your car. Didn't I pilot four different zords without incident?"

Tommy laughed. It was good to be back with friends. "You are absolutely right, Rocko. It isn't fair; you piloted the zords perfectly;" he waited until Rocky's face brightened. "But you still

aren't going to drive my race car. Sorry, Man."

"Yeah, well. I'll find your buddy Trent, later. Maybe he'll be so happy about his fianc  e being here that he'll let me drive his."

Jason shook his head, his eyes bright with laughter. "He'll be happy she's here but I don't think you can count on him being stupid. Hey, Tommy, what is it?" He frowned when he saw how stiff his best friend had become.

"It can't be. Tell me I'm not seeing things."

Jason followed his gaze and immediately realized what had so startled Tommy. "Kim?"

It could be no one else but her walking along the stretch of road leading to the pit areas. She was walking at a leisurely pace and seemed to be taking everything in, almost as if she were looking for someone. Before Rocky and Jason could stop him, Tommy had left the pit and was jogging toward her. Coming up behind him, he picked her up and swung her around in an enthusiastic greeting. He almost dropped her when she kicked back, catching him in the left thigh. If his swing had carried her an inch to the right, he would have definitely dropped her and would most certainly be talking in a higher voice than usual. Instead he set her gently on her feet facing her. Her left hand flashed out to hit him but he caught her fist gently in his hand.

"Kim, wait. Geesh, it's me, Tommy."

Her heart was beating rapidly and for a moment she was once more pulled back into her nightmare from the day before. She stared at Tommy without really seeing him. She frowned and looked at his hand covering her fist. "Tommy?" She lowered her hand.

He grinned wildly and hugged her again. "I can't believe you are here. What are you doing here?"

"Kim!" Rocky and Jason pounced on her then as well. Rocky hugged her first. Then Jason took his turn.

"Rocky, you are as handsome as ever. Jase, it has been way too long. Look at you."

Jason touched her cheek tenderly. "Actually, look at you. What happened, Kim? That could only have been caused by someone's fist."

Tommy sucked in his breath. He had been so excited about seeing her that he hadn't noticed the bruise or her bandaged wrist. He frowned, if someone had hurt her....

Kim forced a smile. "Somebody thought I had more money than I actually did. You should see what the mugger looked like." The lie rolled easily off her tongue. Actually she had never had a chance to throw the first punch at Donavon.

Tommy rubbed his sore thigh. "I can believe it."

Kim blushed and bit her lip. "I am so sorry, Tommy. I'm afraid since the mugging I've had a strike first, ask questions later response."

"After all our time as Rangers, I should have known better. I can't believe you are here. How did you know I was here?"

Kim's eyes and nose wrinkled closer together as she thought about her response. Tommy obviously thought she was there to see him. But what did that mean? "I didn't know. What are you doing here?"

"I started racing for my uncle. This is so wild, Kim. It's like you dropped off the face of the Earth. Where have you been?"

"Here and there. I'm going to college, majoring in social work. It's a long story. So Rocko, Jase, what are you two doing?"

Rocky explained about the dojo but Jason stayed quiet. He was busy studying Kim. He noticed the way she had neatly sidestepped and only half answered Tommy's questions. There were subtle differences about his old friend, differences neither Tommy or Rocky had seemed to notice. What stunned him most about her was the small diamond chip ring on her left hand.

"So Kim, why are you here?" Tommy asked again.

Jason wanted to tell him not to ask. He had a feeling he knew where this was heading and he didn't want to see his friend hurt.

"I'm here with..." She caught the look Jason was giving her. "... a friend. Who is probably looking for me right now."

"There you are." Trent joined them. "We were beginning to wonder where you were. Hey, great, you met Oliver."

Kim looked from her fiance's to her ex-boyfriend and paled slightly. This was the Oliver Trent had been talking about for months now? She wasn't sure if she should laugh or groan.

"Actually, we know each other already. Kim and I used to date." Tommy spoke of the relationship casually but the pain was clear in his eyes. He assumed Kim was friends with Trent's fiance.

Realization dawned on Trent's face. He mentally kicked himself. Why hadn't he made the connection? Suddenly, Kim gave him a hard look. He knew exactly what that look meant.

"Where's..."

"Taking a lap around the track in my car." He grinned, knowing she needed to be picked on right then. She glared at him in mock anger.

Rocky, however, cheered. "All right. I knew you were my kind of man. Can I drive your car next?"

"I was joking, Rocky. Relax, Kimber, Drew is in the pit being entertained by my crew. I was worried about you so I decided to come look for you while I had the chance."

"Trent, do you think you could show Rocky and Jason around? I'd like to talk to Kim for a few minutes."

The former Red Ranger missed the fear that flashed in Kim's eyes as she looked frantically at Trent for help. The other three guys caught the look plainly. Rocky looked at Jason surprised by her reaction. Jason just looked down at the ground. Trent smiled. He knew he was facing being in the doghouse for this but knew that fate had placed them in a situation that Kim would never had placed herself.

"Sure, no problem. Come on, guys. No, Rocky, I am not going to let you drive my car. I'll see you in a bit, Kim." He leaned down and gave her a chaste kiss on the cheek and whispered in her ear. "Talk to him, Kimber. You both deserve this. I love you, Angel."

As the three boys walked off, Tommy touched Kim's shoulder. She knew he wanted her to look at him, knew he wanted her to explain the letter. But she wasn't ready to do either. Darn Trent and his noble intentions.

"So, you know Trent. He's a great guy. Do you go to school with his fiance?"

Kim closed her eyes tightly and clenched her left hand into a tighter fist. It felt like she was holding a knife, ready to stab him in the back once more. She knew he wasn't dating anyone. Trent had told her in several letters how bad he felt for his buddy "Oliver" because he seemed so lonely. Where was Kat? She had consoled herself for the past two years with the hope that the new Pink Ranger would be there for him. Slowly she turned to look at him, her eyes bright and suspiciously wet.

"Actually, I am Trent's fiance."

Her words hit him like a physical blow. She was engaged to someone besides him. He knew he had no right to be hurt. She had broken up with him; he knew she wasn't in love with him. "Congratulations. Like I said, he's a great guy."

A soft smile touched Kim's lips. "Yeah, he is. So, when did you stop being a Ranger? You wouldn't be able to tour otherwise."

In a dull voice, he explained about the power transfer. Kim's eyes widened in surprise at how much everything had changed. "Wow, who knew things could change so much in two years. I've missed everyone so much."

"Until recently, we hadn't gone anywhere. You're the one who broke off all contact after you sent me that letter." Tommy hated the hard edge that had crept into his voice. Part of him wanted nothing more than to take her in his arms and tell her that he didn't care why she had wrote that letter because he still loved her. But he couldn't. He couldn't because the rest of him was still hurt by what she'd done; couldn't because the rigid way she was holding herself said she wouldn't welcome it; couldn't because she was his friend's fiance.

Kim hung her head. "I know. You're right, but I had my reasons."

"Yeah, like falling for some other guy. Trent? Was he the one or is he just the latest in a string of guys? Couldn't you have at least had the common courtesy of coming home and telling me in person?"

Kim told herself that Tommy had every right to hate her but his words cut deep into her soul. She looked him in the eye, her own eyes full of tears. "No, I couldn't, Tommy. I know that letter was the cruellest thing I could do to you and I've regretted it every day of my life since then. But if I had to do it over again, I would do the exact same thing. I was in the middle of an impossible situation. A situation that was so bad there were no good choices to choose from. So, I made the best one I could from a list of horrible alternatives."

The misery in her face was so apparent that Tommy couldn't stop himself from gently caressing her uninjured cheek. "What, Beautiful? What could have been so bad that the best choice was to break up with me through a letter?"

"I can't talk about it, Tommy. The risks are too great."

"Does Trent know the story?" A note of jealousy colored his words.

Kim nodded and wiped her eyes. "He was, I guess you could say, all mixed up in what happened. But he wasn't the reason I broke up with you. He had nothing to do with that part. Hate me if you want to but don't let this ruin your friendship with Trent."

"I don't hate you, Kim but I don't know if I can still be friends with Trent. The pain would be too great."

Kim nodded. "I wanted to be fair to you. What I did, I did to keep from ruining your life."

Tommy's own eyes were red, his hurt too fresh and raw to feel bad for her. "Yeah, well, you failed at that."

This time it was Kim's turn to react as if she'd been punched. She paled and hung her head, her expression one of utter defeat. "Yeah, well I did a lot of that two years ago, Tommy. Unfortunately, hurting you wasn't even my worst failure."

Without another word Kim turned and walked off. Tommy watched her go. Her shoulder were slumped forward, her head was downcast, and her pace was slow and unsure. In all the time he had known her, in all the battles they had fought with Rita and Zedd, he had never seen her look so defeated. Despite the pain she had caused him, all of a sudden he felt like a complete and total heel.

* * *

Meanwhile Rocky and Jason were learning some of the same things from Trent. Jason noticed how Trent kept looking back over his shoulder checking on the former couple. His worry was evident.

"She's the fiance you went to pick up yesterday." Jason make it a statement, not a question but Trent nodded anyway. Rocky looked at both of them in surprise.

"What?! How did you figure that out?" Rocky looked back to where Kim and Tommy were standing before looking back at Trent and Jason. "Did you know about Tommy?"

"That they had dated? Yes, Kim and I don't keep secrets from each other. But I swear I didn't know that Tommy Oliver my racing buddy was the Tommy she loved so much. If I had known I wouldn't have let them run into each other that way. I would have warned them ahead of time. Kim has hated herself for the way things ended between them since the moment she mailed that letter."

"Did you know her then?" Rocky frowned.

Trent nodded. "Yeah, I met her almost as soon as she came to Florida. She and my sister were roommates and best friends."

Jason stopped and made Trent look at him. "Tell me one thing. Were you the guy she broke up with Tommy over?"

"No, not directly. I'm partially to blame though. I'll admit that but I'm not proud of it. Kim isn't the only one who has some self-hate over what happened two years ago."

He resumed walking. Almost ten feet from his pit area, a small child began to wail. Without looking back at Jason and Rocky, Trent began to run. The part of them that would forever be Rangers made Jason and Rocky run after him.

Trent immediately scooped up the two year old that was standing in the middle of the pit area screaming for all he was worth. Trent couldn't see anything wrong with him so he cut his eyes over to his crew. They looked at him guiltily.

"He had been sitting in the car pretending to drive. Mark got ready to take the car for a test run so we pulled Drew out. Drew didn't like that and began to cry. I guess that's when he noticed you were around."

Trent remembered what Kim had told him last night about laughing, however, the adrenaline was pumping too fast for him to do anything but hold him close.

"Dada!" Drew's tone was slightly accusatory between sobs.

"Missed you ole daddy, huh? Shh, calm down, Slugger. You're okay."

Jason and Rocky exchanged a look. Kim's fiancé had a son? What had she gotten herself into? "Who's your friend?"

Trent bit his lip at Rocky's question. If Oliver was Kim's beloved Tommy, these two who were such good friends with him had to have been her friends as well. How much would she want them to know?

"Rocky, Jason, this is Drew Connerey, my son."

Though he came from a large family, Rocky had never learned the art of gauging a baby's age. All he knew for sure about the one in Trent's arms was that he was older than a year but younger than a

kindergartner. "Does Kim know about him?"

Jason shot him a look. He wouldn't have asked that question. Not that he wasn't curious but because he felt it was a sure bet that Kim knew all about him. The real question, he was afraid, was who was the baby's mother, Kim or someone else?

"Yeah, Kim knows him very well. She's cared for him from the moment he was born."

"Mama!" Drew stopped crying and struggled to be free of Trent's firm, loving embrace. He looked over to where the toddler was pointing. Sure enough, Kim was walking slowly toward them. She was obviously upset about something.

Sensing Kim needed Drew as much as Drew wanted her, Trent replanted the two year old on the ground and watched as he started running toward her. He was screaming "Mama," loudly and firmly demanding attention.

Kim dropped to her knees and opened her arms wide to let him run into her embrace. Closing her arms around his tiny body, she stood with him. She gave him a big kiss and joined the others in the pit area, talking to Drew the entire time.

"I missed you this morning, Slugger. I woke up and you were gone. Have you been crying? Trent?" She paid Rocky and Jason no attention. Her full concern was on Drew. That was okay by them because it gave them a chance to observe her. She looked like she had been crying just as hard as Drew had been.

"He's okay, Angel. He just realized we weren't around. You okay?"

Fresh tears welled up in her eyes as she shook her head. "No, not really. But I will be."

Trent wrapped his arms around both Kim and Drew and kissed her tenderly. "Of course you will be."

Kim almost seemed to melt against him. At the same time she seemed to be gaining strength from him. The family picture was so sweet Jason could feel tears forming in his own eyes.

"Trent, I hate to break this up but Mark needs you at the track."

Trent sighed. "Can't it wait?"

"Not if you want to do well in the race tomorrow."

"Go on, honey, I'll be okay. I'll talk Drew to the park near the trailer."

The last thing he wanted to do at that moment was leave her alone. Though he barely knew them, he looked to Rocky and Jason for help. Rocky smiled. "Don't worry about her. Jason and I will keep her company. Looks like we have a lot to catch up on."

Trent knew he really had no choice. "Okay. If you need me..."

"I'll holler. I love you."

"Love you, too."

Kim turned to Rocky and Jason, acknowledging them at last. "Guess my secret is out, huh?"

"More than one it seems."

"Yeah," she kissed Drew's cheek as he patted her tear-stained face. "Would one of you watch him for just a second? I need to wash my face."

"If he'll let us." Rocky reached out for the toddler. At first Drew was reluctant but then Rocky fished a chocolate kiss from his pocket and unwrapped it. When Drew saw the offered treat, he willingly left Kim's arms for Rocky's. Kim gave him a mock glare for bribing the toddler but the slight smile gave him away. Blowing the two year old a kiss she crossed the pit area to the small bathroom.

Rocky looked at Jason. "Kim's a mother?! How did that happen?"

Jason frowned. "The usual way I guess. I wonder if Tommy knows about this?"

"More." Drew demanded as the small piece of chocolate disappeared into his mouth. Rocky unwrapped another piece and gave it to him.

"She looked pretty upset. Maybe one of us should go check on Tommy."

Jason nodded. "Why don't you do that. I think I can get Kim to talk to me. We've known each other way too long for her to be able to put me off."

"Right. Should I mention this little guy?"

"Only if he does. We don't know the full story. Just because he calls her Mama doesn't mean she is."

By the time Kim emerged from the restroom, Drew was devouring his fourth chocolate kiss. His mouth was coated with the sticky candy. Kim took one look at him and shook her head. "Someone was a lot nicer to you than I am."

"More." Drew grinned.

"No, no more." Kim grabbed his diaper bag and fished out a wet wipe. Seeing her coming, Drew ducked his head onto Rocky's shoulder smearing chocolate on the sleeve of his blue T-shirt. Kim laughed. "I'm sorry, Rocko, but you were the one who gave it to him."

Once she had him cleaned up, she took her back from Rocky. "You guys don't have to go to the park with us."

"Wouldn't miss it, Kim. Rocky's not joining us though, he has something else he needs to do."

Kim nodded. She knew that meant Jason was going to grill her and thought she'd be more willing to talk it were only him. So the question was, what should she tell him? The truth or a carefully constructed lie? Neither would leave him with a very high opinion of her.

They walked in silence except for Drew's jabbering. Once in the small park, Kim set Drew on the ground and let him run off to the sandbox. She and Jason took a couple of steps to the bench. Sitting down, Kim drew up her legs up close to her chest. She had discovered that this position tended to decrease the pressure on her sore ribs.

"Funny how dreams change, huh, Jason? Three years ago, I never would have pictured my life like this."

"Are you happy?"

"Usually, yeah. My life is full and there is never a dull minute. But days like today, I'm reminded what all I had to give up and it hurts like Hell all over again. I'm so sorry I hurt Tommy but there was no way around it."

"Why did you break up with Tommy? Bottom line, Kim."

Kim watched Drew scoop up sand and throw it up in the air. Sand landed in his hair and on his clothes but Drew laughed and squealed in delight. A slight smile played on her lips but it didn't reach the faraway expression in her eyes. "All of a sudden, I was facing the most assume responsibility a girl could ever be given: motherhood. All my hopes, dreams and fantasies were dashed with one fell swoop. That realization was devastating but at the same time I wanted Tommy to put his arms around me and tell me it was going to be all right. Then it hit me that I couldn't do that to him. It wouldn't be fair. How could I mourn the things that I was being forced to give up and then expect someone else to do the same thing? I knew if I told him what was going on, he would have dropped everything to be there for me. My knight in a White Falcon Zord."

"So you took the choice away from him." There was no recrimination in his voice, only respect. He couldn't imagine what it must have been like for Kim. He took a deep breath and asked the question he had no right to ask. "Is Tommy Drew's father?"

Kim's heart skipped a beat. She had dreaded the question but had been expecting it since Rocky and Jason had seen Drew. She knew her one word answer would condemn her without the truth but the truth was something she couldn't tell. "No."

Jason nodded but said nothing else. Like Rocky, he wasn't good at judging ages but he knew enough to know Drew was well over a year old. Therefore, Kim was pregnant long before she broke up with Tommy. So if Tommy wasn't the father... He let the thought dangle because the alternative was too hard to contemplate.

Kim knew what he was thinking and suddenly wanted to tell him the whole truth. "I never cheated on Tommy. Even after I sent him the letter, I loved him. It wasn't until after Drew turned a year old that I began to realize I had feelings for Trent other than friendship."

Jason looked at her puzzled. "What are you saying, Kim? How can you say you didn't cheat on Tommy and explain how Drew was conceived?"

"I'd like an answer to that too."

Kim twisted around at the familiar voice. Tommy was standing behind her. Rocky was a few paces behind him looking uncomfortable. Tommy's expression was one of contempt and anger. His eyes so full of righteous fury and hate sent a chill down her spine. At that moment he looked more like he did as Rita's evil Green Ranger than she had ever seen him.

Kim's heart dropped to her feet. If she had had any hope that Tommy could ever forgive her or ever want to be friends again, it was now dashed. With a frown, she muttered her favorite mommy curse. "Oh, fudge."

Chapter Four

"How old is Drew?"

Kim eased up on the picnic table and looked back to where Rocky had started pushing Drew in the toddler seat swing. After Tommy's arrival, Jason and Rocky had offered to entertain Drew, where the former couple could talk. It had taken some persuading on their part to convince her. Part of it was because she wasn't sure she trusted the two boys with her son and partly because she was dreading this conversation. Finally she had given in but only to going as far as the picnic tables where she could see what was going on.

"Kim?"

She took a deep, steadyng breath. "He turned two last month."

Tommy looked away and nodded. "So you waited until he was born to break up with me. You had nine months to get used to the idea but still you couldn't face me and tell me in person."

"It's not that simple, Tommy. Facing you didn't become a problem until after he was born. It's a long story..."

"A long story with too many risks, so you've said, Kim. Forgive me but that's not good enough. And why wasn't it a problem before he was born? You knew from the beginning that there was no way I was the father. I don't understand; before you left for Florida, everything was so great between us. We were as close as two people could be but every time I broached making love to you, you changed the subject. All you would ever say was that you wanted to wait until you got married." He looked away, his voice thick with emotion. "But I guess that was a lie and it must have just been me you had a problem with sleeping with. Because not only have you had sex, you apparently had sex with Trent within a few weeks of arriving in Florida."

"That's not true, Tommy." Her voice was low, almost inaudible.

Tommy growled in frustration. "Then how do you explain Drew? You

can't make a baby without sleeping with someone, Kim."

"MAMA!" Drew called out in delight from the top of the slide. Kim bit her lip in concern that Rocky would carry the two year old up that high but then she saw that he had a tight grip on the toddler and that Jason was hovering protectively nearby. She waved at him as she mulled over what Tommy had asked and said.

There was no other way around it, she had to tell him the truth. "Like you heard me tell Jason; I never cheated on you. Trent is not Drew's father. Trent's name is on the birth certificate but we did that to keep Drew's existence a secret from the man who did father him. If Donavon Black found out Drew was alive..." She shuddered hard but didn't finish her sentence.

Tommy reached over and gently massaged her shoulder. As mad as he was, he couldn't help but worry as he saw the pain in her eyes. "Tell me about him, Kim. Who is Donavon Black?"

"A cold, black-hearted, sorry excuse of a human being. Oh, don't get me wrong, I thought he was a great guy at first. He was a regular Prince Charming. He was every mother's dream for her daughter, until you stood up for yourself and went against him. Then it was goodbye, Dr. Jeckyll; hello, Mr. Hyde."

"Did he rape you? Is that why you couldn't talk to me and tell me you were pregnant?"

"Oh, boy." Kim looked up at him, her eyes bright with unshed tears. She thought about the Sir Walter Scott quote Trent had used the night before. "Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive. Okay Tommy, let me back up. What I am about to tell you may not seem like it has anything to do with anything but please hear me out without interrupting. Okay?"

Tommy nodded. Kim was about to continue when Jason sheepishly approached. He smiled apologetically. "I'm sorry to interrupt but Drew is hungry. Is it okay if Rocky and I take him to get lunch?"

"If you're sure you want to. He'll eat practically anything that doesn't bite back but I'm afraid he's got the table manners of a two year old."

"I could say the same about Rocky but I'm willing to go to lunch with him." That got a laugh from both Tommy and Kim. "Seriously, we thought we'd take him to McDonalds and let him play in the play area for a while. That way you two can talk without you looking at us the whole while like we are going to break Drew."

Kim blushed. She was about to protest but realized she had been doing exactly that. Once she started telling Tommy what really happened, it would be better if her attention wasn't divided. "Sure, go ahead. Be careful. Take his bag with you. I haven't started to potty train him yet but he should be fine for now. Don't let him run with food in his mouth; he might choke. No soft drinks either. He can drink either lemonade or fruit juice."

"Kim, we can handle it just fine. Don't worry."

"Don't worry, right. No problem." Jason turned to leave. "Jase, he's scared of clowns."

"Goodbye, Mommy." Jason laughed as he walked away.

Tommy shook his head. "It's weird seeing you in 'Mommy Mode.' "

"It's sometimes just as weird lapsing into it. Maybe I should have said no."

"Drew will be fine. Rocky at least has plenty of experience with kids."

"Actually, I'm more worried about Jase and Rocky. Dining out with Drew is an experience few could forget. So where was I?"

"You didn't want me to interrupt while you told me a story that might not seem like it has anything to do with anything."

"Okay. When I first arrived in Florida, I was paired with a girl named Andrea Connerey, Trent's sister. We were so much alike both in looks and actions that people called us twins. I thought Trini and I were best friends but I immediately felt like Andi and I had known each other all our lives. She had just started dating her brother's best friend Donavon. Their relationship was intense right from the beginning. When I first met him, Donavon reminded me so much of you. I thought it was appropriate; we had so much in common, why shouldn't we be attracted to the same type of person. Andi was so happy with him that it made me miss you even more." She smiled at him, her expression far away as she remembered those early days at the training center.

** "Come on, Kim. Please, just this once. It's not like you and Trent would be on a date. Donavon's dad gave him four tickets to the concert, primo seats. I know you want to see her as much as I do. You wouldn't be cheating on Tommy. Call him and see what he says about it. I guarantee you, he'll say go."

Kim dropped down on her bed and looked at her roommate. "I don't want to give your brother the wrong idea. Come on, Andi, you and I both know Trent has a crush on me."

Andrea rummaged through her closet looking for the perfect dress. "So, he has a crush on LeAnn Rhymes too, but he's not going to her concert tonight expecting it to be a date."

Kim laughed and rolled her eyes. "Let's hope not."

Andrea knelt beside Kim's bed and looked at her pleadingly. "Kim, Trent knows that you are as deliriously happy with Tommy as I am with Donavon. It's a concert Kim, not a commitment. Donavon has two extra tickets. One he is giving to his best friend, the other he gave to me to give to mine. It's as simple as that. It's just like if you were to do something with Billy, Jason, or one of your other male friends. I know you did things with them even if Tommy wasn't around. So why should this be any different?"

Feeling her resolve weakening, Kim groaned. "Okay, okay Andi, enough with the puppy dog eyes. I'll go." **

—

"That night I don't think Trent and I said more than a dozen words to each other. Andi and Donavon never even noticed. They were so wrapped up in each other I don't know if they even heard half the songs. Andi and I never discussed it but I knew that she and Donavon were sexually active. Andi was a big girl and could make her own decisions but I had a feeling Donavon was the one pushing for them to have sex. I didn't think much of it. After all, you were always the one to bring the subject up when you and I were making out. I thought Donavon was a nice guy and would never do anything to hurt Andi."

Kim paused for a moment trying to figure out how to continue. Tommy gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. "A couple of days after the concert, Andi woke me up, worried and upset."

—

** "Kim."

Kim rolled back over and buried her head deeper under the pillow. She wasn't ready to wake up yet. She groaned when her roommate shook her again.

"Kim, please!"

This time she heard the fear and tears in Andi's voice through the sleep-haze that surrounded her. She woke up instantly and sat up. Andrea was sitting on the edge of Kim's bed, crying. Her face was pale and a little green around the edges. Alarmed, Kim reached out to touch her roommate's arm.

"What's wrong, Andi?"

"Kim, I think I may be pregnant. My period is three weeks late and I've thrown up twice already this morning." The teen wiped her eyes. "I'm sorry, Kim. I shouldn't have woken you up. It's only five a.m. It just hit me this morning what all this could mean and I got scared. Go on back to sleep. We can talk about this later."

"I can't go back to sleep after a bombshell like that. Andi, are you sure? What kind of protection did the two of you use?"

Andi wouldn't look at her. Kim shook her head. "Andi, I know you know about safe sex. Didn't Trent at least use a condom?"

The girl cried harder. "He said he hates wearing them. He promised me the first time we slept together that it would be all right. He told me this couldn't happen and I believed him. I am so stupid. Oh, Kim, what am I going to do?"

Kim hugged the girl tightly. "The first thing we are going to do is find out for sure if you are pregnant. I'll get dressed and run down to the store and get a home pregnancy test. Then we'll go from there."

Throwing on a pair of sweat pants and a sweat shirt, Kim rushed to the store. Within ten minutes she was back and the two girls were reading the instructions. Andi disappeared into the bathroom to follow the directions. Once she was back in the bedroom, Andi sank onto Kim's bed as the two girls waited for the results.

"How could I be so dumb? There is no way I can compete in the Globals if I'm pregnant. Donavon is going to be so mad at me."

"Why? He's as responsible for this as you are, maybe more so because he was the one who refused to take precautions. Andi, please promise me, no matter what the test results say, that you won't sleep with him again unless he agrees to use a condom."

"I don't think I ever want to have sex again, period." She glanced at her watch. "Time's up. I can't look at it. Kim, will you?"

-

"Sure," the petite teen disappeared into the bathroom and returned less than a minute later carrying the stick. Her face was pale and her expression shaky. "It's a plus sign. I'm sorry, Andi; you're pregnant." **

"I don't understand, Kim." Tommy frowned, forgetting his promise not to interrupt.

Kim didn't chide him. She was grateful for the interruption because it gave her a chance to get better control over her emotions. "As near as she could figure, she was about a month along. For her, there was only one option: have the baby and raise him or her. She didn't want to tell her brother until she had a chance to talk to Donavon. She knew Trent wouldn't take the news well and wanted to put it off as long as possible. I think she really believed that Donavon would agree with her decision and that they would get married. I thought he would too because I knew that that is what you would have done if you'd been him. I can't believe now that I ever thought he reminded me of you."

Kim looked up at her former boyfriend but Tommy doubted she even saw him. She continued. "When she told Donavon, he insisted that she have an abortion. He was so furious and insistent that it scared her. He was treating her like it was all her fault that she had gotten pregnant. I think he really believed that just because he told her to terminate the pregnancy that she would do it without hesitation."

"But she didn't." Tommy couldn't help but interrupt again. He still didn't have a clue to where this story was going and what it had to do with her own pregnancy but Kim's voice was so haunted that he couldn't help but listen to her.

"No. She didn't believe the baby should have to pay for her mistakes. She figured he was too much in shock to react any other way. She said nothing more about it to him and let him believe what he wanted to believe. She knew by the time he found out she hadn't terminated the pregnancy, she would be too far along for an abortion. She thought once he realized that there was no other option that he would come around and accept what was going on. Only she and I knew about the

pregnancy until she was five months along. That's when we had our physicals and the doctor had to report the pregnancy to Coach Schmidt. He had no choice but to cut her from the team. She moved in with Trent. He was stunned and more than a little upset that she hadn't told him the minute she had found out."

"I guess Donavon found out as well. How did he take the news?"

Kim stiffened. Tommy could feel her icy anger; he knew her anger wasn't directed at him but at the memories her story was invoking. "He was livid. Andi showed up at my room one night at two a.m. She was afraid to stay at Trent's for the rest of the night. Trent was out of town and Donavon kept calling her. Donavon accused her of purposely getting pregnant in order to trap him. When she told him that that wasn't true, he accused her of sleeping around and denied being the father. He made a few vague threats but nothing she could really prove."

"Did she still love him?"

"At this point, no. She tried to tell him that she didn't want anything from him. She realized they would never be a family. It hurt her but she tried to put Donavon out of her mind and concentrate on the baby. Apparently Donavon wasn't satisfied with that. During the next month, Andi had seven unexplained accidents. She dismissed them as coincidence but I believed it was Donavon. I was scared of him. I couldn't prove it but I was convinced he was trying to make her lose the baby. Andi wasn't sure that he was that dangerous but she was still didn't want to have anything more to do with him."

"What about Trent?"

"Around Trent, Donavon was his old, sweet, charming self. Trent just wanted the two to resolve their differences and get married before the baby was born. To his way of thinking, it was simple. Donavon was his best friend and Andi was his sister; they belonged together and the sooner they realized that and got married the happier they would all be. Keep in mind that Trent had never seen Donavon's dark side and Andi wasn't scared enough of Donavon to say anything to upset her brother. I was still avoiding Trent like the plague because of his crush on me. I didn't want anything to happen to betray your trust in me. Besides, I had been a Power Ranger; after all those monsters I should be able to handle one ordinary jerk, right?"

Suddenly, Kim wished Rocky and Jason were back. She suddenly had this overwhelming desire to hold Drew tightly against her body. "Then Donavon's father found out about the pregnancy. He was excited about being a grandfather so Donavon had no choice but to once again turn on the charm. To please his father, he had to win Andi back. He spent the next month doing everything in his power to make her love him again. But it was no use. She had seen his dark side and couldn't forget how ugly it was. I could see she was getting depressed. By the time she was seven months pregnant, she was twenty pounds over her usual weight, scared, and worn out from resisting Donavon. I was worried about what all that stress was doing to her so when my next long weekend came up, I suggested we get away for a little while."

** "This was such a great idea, Kim. Thanks." A visibly pregnant Andi set her tote bag on the floor of the rustic cabin as Kim and Trent carried in the rest of the stuff. "I'm so glad we never sold the cabin after Mom and Dad died."

"I don't know that this is such a good idea. What if something happens?" Trent folded his arms over his chest.

"Then we'll drive down the road to that little clinic we passed. Relax, Trent; it's not like I'm alone. Kim will take care of me. Now remember, Trent, I don't want anyone to know we are here. Please."

"I don't like this." Trent insisted once again.

Kim momentarily stopped putting items in the refrigerator. "You don't have to like it; you just have to do it. She's still two months away from her due date; she'll be fine. This is a girls only weekend. Don't tell anyone where we are. Now, goodbye, Trent."

Kim practically shoved him out of the cabin, closing the door behind her. With a sigh, she turned back toward Andrea in time to see her friend ease into a chair and shake her head.

"You should give Trent a chance, Kim."

Kim groaned softly as she returned to putting away their supplies. "No offense, Andi, but I don't want to give your brother a chance. I have a boyfriend, remember? Tommy and I may not get to see each as often as we'd like but we still love each other very much."

Andi laughed. "Kim, I'm not suggesting you date him. Trent knows you love Tommy. He doesn't want to come between the two of you. But he would like to be your friend. I know you know that guys can be just friends with a girl without expecting a red hot romance. Or is there something you haven't told me about those good looking guys from back home that you call your friends?"

Kim flushed deep red. "Okay, you have a point there, I guess. I'll think about what you said at least. But no more talk about guys for the rest of the weekend. I won't mention Tommy and you are not to even think about you know who. Understood?"

"Understood." Andi hugged Kim. "Thanks again for suggesting we do this. Being away from everything is exactly what I need."

The rest of the day and evening found Kim and Andrea playing board games and cards. Laughing and joking the entire time, they baked chocolate chip cookies and devoured the plateful. Soon Andrea felt the stress of the last few months slowly lift off her shoulders.

"Kim, can I ask you to do me a big favor?"

"Sure, as long as it does not involve eating another cookie. I am going to be so huge."

"When you get to be my size, then you can complain about being huge. But don't worry, this has to do with the baby. Will you be his or her godmother?"

Tears touched Kim's eyes. "Oh, wow, I'd be so honored. Thank you." Getting up she walked around the table and hugged her friend tightly.

"Don't cry, Kim. My hormones are so messed up, you'll have me bawling, too. One thing you don't want to do is make a pregnant lady cry."

That made Kim laugh. Later that night, Kim was lying in bed, wide awake and thinking about the awesome responsibility Andi had asked of her. What better honor could anyone bestow on a friend than to trust them with your most prized possession? The distinct tinkle of glass breaking broke Kim away from her thoughts. Was someone breaking into the cabin?

Her Power Ranger instincts kicked in as she slipped from the bed. Taking no time to throw a robe over her sleep shorts and top, Kim edged along the wall to the door. Easing it open, she cautiously stepped out into the main room and looked around.

In the dim moonlight, she cold see the curtains blowing in the gentle breeze. Kim frowned. That window was closed when they went to bed. Kim had doubled checked it herself. She took another step toward the open window.

A hand snaked around her waist and another clamped a cloth over her mouth and nose. She realized it was chloroform when her head started spinning. Holding her breath, she began to struggle in a way she had not had to do since she relinquished her powers to Kat.

With a grunt, her assailant lifted her from her feet and slammed her head against the wall. Bright lights danced behind her eyes and she forgot to hold her breath. Darkness swallowed her as she sagged against him.

She wasn't sure how long she had been out when she awoke to hear Andrea whimpering. Kim groaned as her head throbbed. Somewhere in her rattled brain she realized she was tightly bound to a straight back chair. She flexed her muscles but the bonds had no give. "Andi? Are you okay?"

"Shut up, Kim. You've caused me enough trouble already."

Donavon, how had he known where they were? Kim gave the question only a moment's thought as she focused her attention on the situation before her. Only a single lamp lit the room but it was enough for Kim to see the predicament Andi was in. The pregnant teen was similarly tied to a chair but she had obviously been beaten. Her nose was bleeding and her lip was swollen; her cheek and eye were already bruising.

"How did you find us?" Kim asked, hoping to turn his attention from Andrea. She knew she had succeeded when he backhanded her savagely across the mouth. The force was so great that the chair teetered and almost fell. Her cheek stung but she would gladly take a thousand blows if it kept him from hurting Andi.

"Do you really want to know how I found you? It wasn't hard; all I had to do was ask Trent. He was glad to tell me exactly how to get

here. He understands that Andi and I belong together and that I should have my baby."

Kim stared at him in disbelief. Trent wouldn't have really betrayed them. There had to be another answer. "Liar."

"I told you to shut up." His eyes were wild. She had never seen him so out of control. Andi whimpered again and it caused Kim's blood to boil.

"You think you're tough because you can beat up a girl who's seven months pregnant and tied to a chair? Untie me and then we'll see how bad you are." What good had it been to battle Rita and Zedd if she couldn't use those fighting skills to defend a good friend?

Donavon laughed. "Maybe when I'm through with Andi, I'll tame you. Now shut up and stay out of my business."

Kim's eyes filled with tears. She had been scared of him since Andrea's first "accident" but even she had no inkling just how mad he really was until now. "She's pregnant, Donavon. You can't do this."

Donavon grabbed Kim's cheeks and squeezed hard. His eyes flashed. "I know she's pregnant. If she had just had the abortion like I told her to this wouldn't be happening. But no, she had to be stubborn. My dad wants to be a grandfather but she won't let me back in her life."

He released Kim's face and whirled toward Andrea. "That's my baby you are carrying. I want him now."

"No, no, no." Andi whimpered frantically. Sweat was standing on her forehead and she looked like she was in severe pain. Kim was truly worried about her. She knew the doctor had expressed concern about Andi's blood pressure. It was one of the reasons why Kim had suggested the getaway.

"Donavon, you are insane!"

"SHUT UP!" Donavon's leg shot out catching the leg of the chair Kim was tied to. The breath was momentarily knocked out of her as she landed hard on her back. He gave her no time to recover before kicking her savagely in the side.

"Just couldn't keep you mouth shut could you? When I'm through with you, you'll regret ever sticking your nose in my business." The blows rained down hard on the former Ranger but Kim could do nothing to defend herself tied to the chair. What he did to her didn't matter though, so long as he left Andi alone.

Andi screamed for him to stop but he ignored her. Suddenly a hard, all-over cramp squeezed her stomach and she felt something wet run down her legs. Having just completed her Lamaze class, she knew that the sticky fluid that had soaked her underwear meant her baby was in more danger than from just Donavon's presence.

"Kim! My water just broke."

Donavon stopped his viscous attack and turned to look at Andrea. He

smiled. "Good, I was afraid I would have to cut the baby out."

Kim's left eye was rapidly swelling shut and her chest and ribs protested every breath but she instantly turned her attention to Andi. "It's too early. We have to get her to the hospital. Donavon, be reasonable. The baby is premature and will die if he or she does not receive proper care."

"No, everything will be fine." Donavon untied Andi and picked her up. As he disappeared into the bedroom Kim could hear Andi's screams of protest. A moment later, Donavon returned and knelt beside Kim. "You are going to deliver the baby."

Kim stared at him in horror. "Are you crazy? Don't answer that, of course you are crazy. I wouldn't know where to begin to deliver a full term baby, let alone a premature baby. If you love the baby at all or if you have even a sliver of a heart you won't do this."

Donavon pulled a knife from a sheath on his belt. Kim's heart thudded loudly against her chest. With one hand, he flipped the chair with Kim attached on its side and slit the rope binding her to the chair. He hauled her to her feet and pushed her up against the wall.

"You better hope for a miracle, Kim, because you are all Andi's going to have. You'd better do a good job because if the baby dies, so will you."

Donavon shoved her toward the bedroom. Kim immediately went to Andrea's side and sat on the bed beside her. Her battered body protested each movement but she pushed it aside much like she used to do as a Ranger.

"Andi."

"God, Kim, I can't believe this is happening. I can't have this baby right now. It's too early."

"Well, early or not, it looks like you don't have much of a choice. This is all my fault, Andi. I never should have suggested coming up here."

A contraction caused Andrea to tense up and cry out. Not knowing what to do, Kim let her best friend squeeze her hand. When the contraction ended, Andi continued the conversation.

"Not your fault. Blame Donavon. This really hurts, Kim."

"I'm afraid it's going to get worse. Andi, you've been through Lamaze, you're going to have to tell me what to do."

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Kim's whole body was taut. Tommy could tell she was reliving that night all over again. This time he didn't interrupt. He was scared what might happen if she was suddenly snatched back to the present. He hoped Rocky and Jason stayed away for a little bit longer.

"That was the longest night of my life. I was scarcely aware when the sun came up. Donavon kept sticking his head in and yelling at us. In all our battles with Rita and Zedd, I was never as scared as I was that night. Andi was amazing. I can't even begin to imagine her pain but between contractions she would talk to me." Kim shuddered with the memory.

"She told me she didn't think Donavon would let her live after the baby was born. I told her we would get out of there somehow. But Andi didn't believe me. She knew she would be in no condition to escape after giving birth so she asked me to promise that no matter what I would take the baby and get away from Donavon. I told her not to be silly; we'd all get away together. 'We're going to be fine' I promised her faithfully. What an idiot I was."

Tommy couldn't help himself; he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. He hated to see her in so much pain. He wished he hadn't pushed her to talk to him about this.

"I don't know how long it took but finally I was holding the baby in my hands. He was kind of blue and wasn't breathing well so I started mouth-to-mouth. I could hear Andi screaming at me, wanting to know about the baby. Donavon was trying to take the baby away from me. I ignored both of them. I was focused on the helpless baby boy in my arms. When he took his first good breath and began to cry pitifully it was like the world started back to revolving."

—

** With the first cry, Kim let out a shaky breath. Saying a little prayer of thanksgiving, she placed the impossibly small infant on Andi's stomach and turned her attention to tending to the new mother. Donavon knelt beside her, his knife in his hand. Kim looked at him in fear and revulsion.

He smiled. "We have to cut the cord."

Donavon seemed to take perverse pleasure in cutting the umbilical cord. That chore completed, his hand flashed out and Kim screamed in pain. She stared down at her stomach that was now crimson with blood. He had stabbed her.

"I've got to get some things out of the car. I don't want you to get any ideas about leaving."

Once he was gone, Kim pulled herself painfully to the side of the bed. Andi was only partially conscious but she turned to look at her friend. Tears glistened her cheeks. "Kim, take him and run."

Keeping a hand clamped to her bleeding stomach, Kim shook her head. "No, I'm not leaving you."

"Please, Kim, he's going to kill us both and then steal my baby. I don't want that monster anywhere near my baby. Take him and go where Donavon won't get him. You're his godmother, Kim; you have to take care of him. Send help back for me."

Kim lowered her head. She knew Andi was right but couldn't stand the

thought of leaving her friend. She picked the baby up. "I'll get him to the clinic and come back for you. You are going to be fine, Andi. I promise you that."

"I wanted to name him Andrew if he was a boy. I've always liked the name Drew. Kim, promise me you'll take care of him. I don't want strangers raising my baby."

Tears spilled down Kim's cheeks. "They won't; you will."

"Promise me, Kim."

"I promise. I'll be back as soon as I can." Giving her friend's hand one more squeeze, she stumbled toward the window. She had the forethought to grab the car keys out of the night stand drawer on her way out. She lowered herself out of the window despite the fact that she was rapidly losing strength.

Outside she waited until Donavon went back inside before stumbling to her car. She tried not to think about Andrea as she cranked the car and put it in drive. One arm clutched the baby close to her body while the other steered the car.

Bleeding heavily, Kim could feel consciousness leaving her. The car veered off the road and slowed as her foot slipped off the pedal. A car horn startled her awake. She vaguely recognized the car that had stopped next to her. Fearing it was Donavon, she screamed when the door opened beside her.

"Kimber, my God, what happened? Who beat you? Is that Andi's baby? Where is she? Kim, you're bleeding." Trent's voice was frantic.

Taking shallow breaths, Kim filled him in on what had happened at the cabin. "Andi needs help. Go get her. I'll get Drew to the hospital."

Putting his arms under her, Trent lifted her out of the car and carried her to his. "You're in no shape to drive. The clinic is just up the road. I'll get the two of you there and then go back for my sister."

Kim didn't answer him. He stole a sideways look and frowned. She had already passed out, the baby cuddled protectively to her. **

"I woke up at the clinic with twenty stitches in my stomach. The doctor at the clinic told me that he had rigged a makeshift incubator for Drew and that he was doing remarkably well under the circumstances. I was worried about Donavon finding us and taking the baby but Dr. Myers told me he had promised Trent that he wouldn't let anyone near us. Apparently I had been unconscious for two days. Trent had already told Dr. Myers everything I had told him at the car. They had both decided it was better if nobody knew what had happened. Donavon's father is a pretty powerful judge who believes his son is a golden boy who can do nothing wrong. Everything would have been swept under the carpet and Drew would have been given to Donavon."

"What about Andi?"

Kim covered her face with her hands. "I kept asking that same question. Neither Dr. Myers nor Trent wanted to tell me. They kept putting me off telling me I needed to rest. They would tell me when I was stronger, they said. The day after I woke up Trent came in to see me and I was determined to find out."

—

** "Hey, Angel, you're awake. I stuck my head in earlier and you were out like a light."

"Why did you call me Angel?"

"Because that is what you must be. Dr. Myers said it's a miracle that the baby made it. If it hadn't been for you, that four pound baby boy probably wouldn't be right down the hall from here breathing on his own without aid. Without you, he'd be dead."

She struggled to sit up. "Trent, where is Andi? Why won't anyone tell me about her? Is she okay?"

"Lay back down, Kimber. You lost a lot of blood. You and I have the same type but Dr. Myers would only take a pint from me to give to you. It wasn't as much as he would have liked to have given you but it was enough to keep you alive. Dr. Myers said that rest was the best thing for you right now. I'll tell you everything later."

Kim glared at him. Fine, if he wouldn't tell her about Andi, she would ask him about the other thing that was bothering her. "Did you tell Donavon where to find us?"

She waited for him to deny it but Trent hung his head. "I did. He told me he wanted to propose. I just wanted things to work out between them. I didn't mean for all this to happen."

Tears filled her eyes as she glared hard at him. "We told you not to tell anyone. Wasn't that what you heard? Anyone."

He stared at her, his eyes red with tears. "He wanted to propose."

"No." Kim shook her head, her voice harsh. "He wanted to beat her up; he wanted to beat me up. He wanted to steal her child. That's what he wanted to do. That's what he did."

"He didn't steal the baby. The baby is safe thanks to you."

"And thanks to you, he needed saving." Kim winced as pain rippled across her stomach. She clinched her eyes shut. "Andi's dead, isn't she?"

Trent slowly and reluctantly nodded. Kim began to sob. Trent tried to wrap his arms around her but she weakly pushed him away. "Don't. This is your fault. I hate you, Trent. Go away and leave me alone."

"Okay, Angel. I'll leave for now but I'll be back. We have to figure out what to do about the baby."

—"Drew, she named him Andrew before I left with him. We aren't going to figure out anything. You've done enough already. She told me to raise him if something happened so that's what I'm going to do. I'll raise him as my own. I'll fight the devil himself if that's what it takes to carry out her wishes." **—

"Donavon killed her." It wasn't a question. Tommy could tell by the look in her eyes.

Kim nodded. "She was dead by the time Trent went back for her. Donavon had stabbed her repeatedly. He must have been furious when he came back in and found out that the baby and I were gone. Dr. Myers was great. He knew that as long as Donavon thought the baby was alive, he would keep looking. So when he made out Andi's death certificate, he made out a bogus one for her baby. Then he made out Drew's birth certificate listing me as the mother. He suggested we put Drew up for adoption. But I couldn't do that."

"Instead you gave up everything to raise Andi's son." Finally Tommy understood what Kim had gone through two years ago.

Kim wiped her eyes. "I didn't have a choice. I promised Andi. I failed her on the most important promise I ever made to anyone. I couldn't let her down a second time."

"You didn't fail her, Kim. You saved her son's life."

"But I didn't save her. I promised her that I would get her out as well."

"That was a promise she knew you couldn't keep. Kim, you had been beaten and stabbed. It's a wonder you were able to even get away with Drew. You've done a remarkable job raising him. Don't beat yourself up for being human, Kim."

Kim forced a little smile. "Trent's told the same thing a million times."

Tommy frowned. "That's one thing I don't understand, Kim. After what he did, how did Trent end up with you and Drew?"

"He's Drew's uncle. I couldn't deny him the right to be a part of his nephew's life. Besides, as Trent pointed out to me after I left the clinic with Drew, I needed help."

"I would have helped you if you'd asked."

"Oh, Tommy, I couldn't have asked that of anyone. Trent knew that. He knew I was too proud and guilt-ridden to ask for help. So he reminded me that Drew was the only family he had left in the world. So instead of him helping me it was like I was helping him."

"Kim, not many people would have had the courage to do what you have done. Why are you so scared for people to know?"

"Because in the truest sense of the law, Trent and I are kidnappers. We could go to jail if the truth came out. Dr. Myers could lose his license. But most of all, because if Donavon found out that his son

hadn't died right after birth, he would stop at nothing to get Drew back. But that's not going to happen. He'll have to kill me before I let him near my son."

"MAMA." Drew came running across the park, Rocky and Jason jogging along beside him. Pushing off the picnic table, Kim ran to her son and caught him up in a bear hug. Tommy watched the scene, still reeling from his former girlfriend's story. He had new respect for the petite former Pink Ranger. The pain and bitterness he had been carrying for the last two years melted away in a flash.

Tommy's eyes darkened. Donavon Black had better hope he never came face to face with the former Green/White/Red Ranger. Kim had already sacrificed so much because of that arrogant scum and while she might be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to save her son, Tommy knew it would be a cold day in Hell before he ever let her do it.

Chapter Five

Night had long since descended on the city. The area set aside for trailers was dark, save for a single street light and the soft light that spilled out of the small trailer at the end of the lot. A single figure sat on a dirt bike staring up at the stars.

From the doorway of the trailer a petite girl with long caramel hair watched the brooding figure, a wistful look on her face. Glancing back at the silent bedroom, the girl sighed and stepped outside the trailer.

Walking up behind him, Kimberly Hart wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her head on his shoulder. She could only do that when he was sitting down because standing he towered over her with his six foot frame.

"Penny for your thoughts." Kim whispered in his ear.

Trent Connerey swung his legs to the other side of the bike so that he was facing her. "I was thinking about Andi. I didn't do a very good job of protecting her. After Mom and Dad died, we were all each other had. It was my job to keep her safe from people like Donavon; instead I handed her right over to him."

Kim took his hands in her hers and raised them to her lips. She kissed the big rough hands and then placed them over her heart. "Trent, we've been through this over and over again. You saw what Donavon wanted you to see. Andi and I saw him for what he was because he wanted us to see that. If we had confided in you things might have been different but we didn't."

"I might could buy that if I hadn't let you down last week. I didn't protect Andi two years ago and I didn't protect you last week. I can't keep letting the women in my life down when they need me."

Kim's eyes flashed with anger. "Trent Aaron Connerey, I will not stand here and let you keep kicking yourself. You didn't let either one of us down."

"Yeah, but..."

"But nothing. Trent, you jump down my throat every time I blame myself for leaving her behind and not saving her. I won't let you turn around and blame yourself, not for what happen to Andi and not for what happened to me last week. You are always telling me that I'm only human; well Darling, what do you think you are? You couldn't read our minds to know what kind of person Donavon is. As for last week, the last time I checked human cloning was still illegal so it's impossible for you to have been in two places at one time."

Trent looked up at her his eyes bright with tears. "I miss her so much, Kim."

Kim leaned against him, his hands still trapped in hers between them. The tears that she thought she had cried out of earlier in the day filled her eyes once more. "So do I, Trent. Not a day goes by that I don't think about her. Whenever Drew does something cute or has a milestone I wish she were here to see it. But I think she does see everything that happens."

"Where is Drew?"

"Out like a light. Rocky and Jason wore him out today."

Trent smiled. "I think he did the same thing to them. They looked pretty wiped out when they came back to the track with Tommy."

Kim bit her lip at the mention of her former boyfriend's name. It was hard to believe that after two years, he finally knew the truth about why she had broken up with him. She felt like a huge burden had been lifted off her shoulders.

"What's the matter, Angel?" Trent removed his hands from her and cupped her face in his hands.

"I was just wondering what was going through Tommy's mind when I told him the truth. I had just finished when Jason and Rocky came back with Drew. He didn't say anything while they were there but I looked back at him at one point and his eyes were so dark. I've only seen that look in his eyes one other time in all the years that I've known him and it's the scariest thing I've ever seen. For all I know he may still hate me."

Trent held her close and kissed her cheek. "Oh, Angel, I don't see how anyone who truly loved you could ever hate you. But, if he does hate you, knowing what all you sacrificed for Drew; well, then he isn't the man I thought he was. But Kim, with the exception of Donavon, I've never been wrong about a person before."

Kim grinned and kissed him tenderly on the lips and then rested her head on his forehead. "You always know what to say to make me feel better. But you know, it doesn't really matter what he thinks. At least I finally told him the truth. I don't have to feel guilty about lying."

"Have I told you lately how much I love you?"

Kim nuzzled her head on his neck. "Not since I walked out here."

"Well then, let me not waste another minute. Kimberly Ann

Hart-soon-to-be-Connerey, I love you and I would do anything for you."

"And I love you. Nothing and no one will ever change that."

* * *

"Man, I can't believe Kim went through all that and never told us." Rocky shook his head.

"If you had told me yesterday that we would see Kim today and find out something shocking, of all the things I would have imagined it would be, this wouldn't have even made the list." Jason added.

Rocky looked over at the couch where Tommy had been sitting since he started telling them what he had learned from Kim. "You okay, Tommy?"

"All this time, I was so hurt and mad at her because I thought she had found someone else. She didn't betray me for another man. It was all for a baby. There was no one else."

Jason touched his arm. "Maybe not when she wrote that letter, Bro., but that was two years ago. She's engaged to Trent now."

Tommy shook off his friend's arm and rose to stand in front of the window. "But does she love him? How could she? He was the one who led Donavon to her and Andi. Both of you know how Kim is, especially you, Jason. Do anything you want to her but watch out if you hurt someone she cares about. Jason, you were the one who told me she still has a grudge against your neighbor who accidentally ran over your dog in eighth grade? This is much bigger than that. She only let Trent in their lives because he is Drew's uncle. I bet the only reason she is marrying him is because of Drew. You know how Kim is about family. She probably feels like she doesn't have a choice. What we had was special. I feel like I'm being given a second chance with the woman I love. I'd be crazy if I didn't try to recapture that."

Rocky and Jason exchanged a look. They had seen Trent and Kim together, seen how close they were. It certainly didn't look like Kim felt obligated to Trent. Jason felt Tommy was only setting himself up for another heartbreak. "Tommy..."

"No, Jason. I have to do this. I lost Kim once; I can't lose her again. I can't let her marry Trent, not unless she can convince me it's what she truly wants. I'm going for a walk. I'll be back later."

Rocky looked at Jason when they were alone. "So, what do you think?"

"I think one of those guys is going to end up with a broken heart. It's obvious that Tommy's got his heart on his sleeve where Kim is concerned. And it was pretty obvious that Trent adores her."

"So Kim's going to have to choose one or the other."

Jason nodded his brown eyes grim. "Kim will know that no matter whom she chooses, someone's going to be hurt. Kim's like my little sister

and I know her better than I know my real sister. It's going to kill her to know she's hurt either one of them."

Rocky stretched out on the bed. "I don't want to see Kim hurt. After all that she's been through, she deserves to be happy. So what do we do?"

Jason shook his head. "We don't do anything. Kim's going to need us when this all blows up but not if we but in now. I just hope when the time comes we can do more than just pick up the shattered pieces."

* * *

Kim stepped out of the bedroom, a thin light robe over her shortie pajamas. Blushing slightly she walked across the room to kneel beside the couch. Trent had stretched out and pulled a blanket over him. He seemed surprise to see her.

"Something wrong, Angel?"

She bit her lip. "Not really. I just wanted... I mean.... Why is this so hard for me to say? Trent, you don't have to sleep on the couch. I liked having your arms around me all night."

Trent pulled her up on the couch with him and wrapped his arms around her. "Oh, Kimber, waking up this morning with you in my arms was incredible but I don't know. I think, no I know, it's something we could get too used to. I don't want us to get in a situation we don't want to be in. Last night was one thing, I wanted to protect you from your nightmares but I don't know that we should share a bed just for the sake of being able to hold each other." Then a thought flashed through Trent's mind. "Unless you are thinking that maybe your talk with Tommy today is going to make your dreams worse. Is that it?"

Kim leaned her head on his chest. "I could say yes and you would join me in the bedroom without hesitation. But it wouldn't be completely the truth. I've had nightmares every night for the past two years. I've learned how to fight them off except when I'm extremely tired or stressed. After that wonderful rest I got last night, I know I can handle whatever the demons throw at me tonight. I just hate for you to have to sleep on the couch. It's one thing back at the apartment where we each have our own bedroom but that's not an option here. Come to bed with me, Trent. Nothing is going to happen. Besides the fact that Drew will be there, we both love and respect each other enough not to let things go too far."

"If we start this here, I don't know if I could go back to separate bedrooms when the tour is over and we go back to the apartment."

"Then we'll have to make sure it isn't a problem by the time we get back."

Trent watched her carefully. "What are you suggesting, Angel?"

'That we've been engaged since Christmas day. I think it's time we set a date and get married. Let's be husband and wife by the time we

return to the apartment." She blazed a trail of feathery kisses from his shoulder up his neck and ended at his mouth.

For several long minutes, neither spoke any words but they said so much to each other with their long, passionate kisses. Finally, they pulled away from each other at the same time, both out of breath.

Trent cupped Kim's face in his hands. "Our wedding night is going to be so special because of what we've saved for each other to share that night. But I don't want to spend the night alone on this couch. If you trust me; I trust you. Come on, let's go to bed before Drew wakes up and wonders where his mommy is."

* * *

Kimberly Hart sat up with a start. Her heart was beating rapidly and sweat stood out on her forehead. She took a couple of deep breaths to get her breathing rate back to normal. Strong arms wrapped around her and pulled her backward until she was resting against the bare chest of her fiancÃ©.

"Easy, Angel. You're safe. I'm not going to let anything happen to you."

Kim twisted around so that she was facing him and buried her head in his chest. She wrapped her arms around his body and held him tightly. "Don't let go of me, Trent."

Trent kissed the top of her head. "I wouldn't dream of it, Angel. Want to talk about it?"

"It was the usual. Only this time, somehow he captured the three of us; you, me and Drew. I was tied to a chair just like in the cabin the night Drew was born. Drew was in another room but I could hear him screaming for me. Donavon had beaten you to a bloody pulp. I kept thinking that this was going to be just like before. Except this time, you were going to be dead instead of Andi, and Donavon was going to run off with Drew. Once again I was helpless."

Trent held her even tighter as she sobbed into his chest. How many nights had she had dreams such as this with only her pillow to cry into? "Angel, I am not going to let Donavon anywhere near either you or Drew. He'll have to kill me first."

Kim sobbed even harder. "That's what I'm afraid of Trent. I don't want to lose you."

"You aren't going to lose me, Kimber. I'm not going anywhere. I promise you that."

Kim struggled to bring her sobs under control. Neither spoke as they simply held each other. After several long minutes, all that remained of her sobs were hiccups. "I'm sorry I woke you up."

"You didn't wake me up. I was lying here watching you and Drew sleep."

Kim sniffled and grinned. "Learn anything interesting?"

"Besides the fact that you snore?" Trent laughed when she punched him in the arm. "Just joking, Kimber, just joking. You and Drew have some of the same mannerisms. You both tend to sleep on your right side with your left hand tucked up under your chin. I think he's going to be left handed like you are. I know he doesn't have any of your genes but if I didn't know either of you and just happened to see you out somewhere, I would pick him out as your son."

"I would give anything if Andi had lived and had been able to raise him. But from the time I held Drew for the first time after knowing she was gone, I've felt like he was my son."

"Even when you felt like you were a horrible mom?"

In the dim moonlight that spilled into the trailer through the window, Trent could see her eyes twinkling a little in merriment. "Especially then. That's why it upset me so much to think I was a failure."

"I have to be honest with you Kimber, as much as I loved my sister, I don't think she would have been any better a mother than you've been. Now, why don't you close those beautiful brown eyes and go back to sleep."

With one more kiss, Kim turned back over so that her back was up against him. Trent's arms slipped around her body and tightened protectively around her waist. Kim covered his hands with one of her hands, and with the other reached out and gently caressed Drew's baby fine blonde hair.

Trent kissed the top of her head. "Close your eyes, Kimber. Go to sleep."

With a contented sigh, Kim smiled. He knew her so well. Safe in the arms of the man she loved Kim drifted back to sleep.

Chapter Six

"And in the lead is car 62, Tommy Oliver. Right behind him is Car 17, Trent Connerey. Folks, you are seeing two of the finest racers in this circuit."

"Come on, Trent." Kim could barely stand still as she watched the afternoon race from the pit area. Drew was sitting in his stroller, mesmerized by the cars speeding past him. Though he had protested vehemently, Kim was glad she had thought to put cotton in his little ears to muffle the sounds.

"As the lead cars come around the head turn for the final lap, it looks like Connerey in Car 17 is about to make his move and pass current leader Tommy Oliver."

As the announcer spoke, Trent's green and blue car shot out and drew up even with Tommy's red car. For the longest time, the two vehicles stayed side by side, each driver jockeying for position to be in the lead when the checkered flag was waved.

Kim closed her eyes. She couldn't watch, it was so close. Suddenly a cheer rose up from the crew in the pit with her. "He did it. Trent won." Mark shouted from beside her. Kim reopened her eyes.

"He did?"

Mark hugged her and swung her around. "He did it. Man, I thought for sure Oliver had him this time." He set her back down. "Go on over to the winner's circle. Trent will want you there. I'll watch Drew for you."

She kissed him on the cheek to thank him and took off to where the other's were gathering around the winner's circle. It took her several minutes to push her way through the crowd to even see the car. Trent was just emerging from the window. When he saw her elbowing her way through the crowd, he grinned broadly. "Kimber!"

Breaking past the last person, she launched herself at him and hugged him tightly. The crowd cheered even louder when she kissed him. "I'm so proud of you."

* * *

Tommy leaned against the car and watched the young couple in the winner's circle. Rocky shook his head. "I thought you had it for sure, Man."

Tommy shook his head. "It was just a race. You win some; you lose some."

Jason sighed. He recognized the lovelorn look on Tommy's face. Despite what he had said to Rocky the night before about them staying out of the situation, Jason couldn't help but try to convince Tommy to put a stop to things before anyone got hurt. "Kim looks really happy with Trent."

Tommy wouldn't look at him. "Maybe, maybe not. Looks like she's coming this way."

Sure enough, Kim had left Trent's side and was practically skipping toward them. Jason marveled at the difference between her today than yesterday. Revealing her secret and erasing the lie must have been just what she had needed to do. She smiled and kissed Tommy on the cheek.

"Great race, Tommy."

Tommy wrapped his arms around her and hugged her in return. He almost didn't want to let her go when she pulled away. She greeted Rocky and Jason with a hug for each of them.

"Hey, Kim, where's the tricycle motor?" Rocky asked her with a grin.

"Drew's in Trent's pit with Mark. Actually, I'm glad you asked because I need a huge favor."

Rocky groaned. "If it has to do with crawling around in those colored tubes at McDonalds, forget it."

Kim laughed. It was nice to see her so relaxed and carefree. "Not quite. They are having a dance tonight for the racers and their

crews. Trent and I would like to go but we need a baby-sitter. If we were at home, I could do a drop off at Drew's daycare or get one of my friends from college to watch him but I don't know anyone else around here well enough to ask. Please? He'll be absolutely no trouble. I'll have him fed, bathed and in bed before I leave."

Rocky frowned. "I don't know. How well stocked is the fridge?"

Jason jabbed him in the ribs. "Sure, Kim. We'll be glad to watch him. What time do you need us?"

"The dance starts at nine but Trent and I thought that we could grill steaks for supper if you wanted to come at seven to eat first. Tommy, you're invited too. The three of us could walk to the dance together."

Rocky rubbed his hands together. "Who am I to refuse a steak dinner? We'll be there."

* * *

Promptly at seven, Tommy, Jason, and Rocky walked up to the trailer. Trent was standing outside turning steaks on the grill. He smiled when he saw them. "Hey, guys, glad you could make it. But I'm surprised. Usually the only thing Tommy is on time for is the starter pistol of a race. Go on in. Kim's in there getting Drew fed before we eat."

Rocky stayed outside to give Trent a hand but Jason and Tommy went inside. Kim was nowhere to be seen but they heard squealing from the open door of the bedroom. Suddenly, Drew ran into the living room wearing nothing at all. Jason scooped him up in his arms as the two year old ran by. Drew laughed and tried to wiggle free.

"Andrew Trenton Connerey, you'd better come back here and get your clothes on." Kim emerged from the bedroom, looking a little exasperated. Her white T-shirt was soaking wet and was clinging to her body provocatively. Tommy couldn't help but stare at her.

She blushed when she saw them. "Hi guys. Sorry, I didn't know you were here yet. I figured Tommy would be running late." She smiled to let him know she was just joking. "Thanks for catching him, Jason. Come here, Drew. Time to get dressed."

"No dress. Play."

Jason laughed and transferred the squirming boy to his mom. "Looks like he's already been playing."

Kim looked down at her wet front. "He really likes splashing in the water. That's why I wouldn't have put you and Rocky through that. Where is Rocky?"

"Outside with Trent. Aren't you scared he's going to have an accident without a diaper on?" Jason noticed that Tommy wasn't saying anything.

Kim laughed. "No, he's got better control than that. He's almost

ready to be potty trained. But I do need to get him dressed. Make yourselves at home. There are drinks in the fridge."

She disappeared back into the bedroom and closed the door behind her. Jason punched Tommy lightly in the arm. "You're drooling, Man."

Tommy reluctantly wrenched his gaze away from the door Kim had closed. "Sorry, but seeing her in that wet..."

Jason laughed. "Easy, Bro."

The bedroom door reopened and Drew once again ran out. This time he was clad in a diaper and T-shirt. Jason thought he saw something in the toddler's hand and had a suspicion as to what it was. His suspicions were confirmed when something red flashed in his hand as it was thrown.

"Ball." Drew called out as a warning. Jason had seen this maneuver several times the day before and ducked. The red plastic ball hit Tommy square in the chest.

"Oh, Drew." Kim couldn't help but laugh as she emerged from the bedroom. She had changed out of the wet T-shirt into a hot pink muscle shirt. "Sorry about that, Tommy."

"No problem. He's got a good arm."

"That he does." She opened the refrigerator and pulled out a jug of milk. Filling up a sippy cup, she glanced back to the two boys. "Name your poison. We've got soda, O.J., water, tea and milk."

Both boys requested sodas. After handing Drew his sippy cup of milk, she reached back into the refrigerator and pulled out five cans. She handed Jason and Tommy each a can and set hers on the counter. Picking up the other two, she started to the door. Before she could reach it, the door opened and Trent stepped inside carrying a tray. Rocky was right behind him.

Trent set the tray of steaks on the counter and kissed Kim warmly. Kim pressed the cold can drink in his hand and turned away to give Rocky his. She smiled. "I don't know about the rest of you but I am starved. Let's eat."

The five young adults gathered around the table. As they ate, Drew went from person to person, begging for food. Kim kept reminding them that he had already eaten and that he didn't need anything else. But it didn't escape Tommy's notice that Trent was slipping the two year old pieces of meat whenever Kim wasn't looking.

Quickly realizing who he was having the most luck conning out of food, Drew stayed near his father. Not realizing Trent had given him steak, Kim relented and offered Drew a baby carrot from her salad. Drew ran to her side but suddenly began to gag. Reacting quickly Tommy jerked him up and gave him two sharp back blows. Drew began to cough and scream at the same time that a partially chewed up piece of meat fell out of his mouth.

Kim took Drew from Tommy and held him tight, her own tears filling her eyes. She glared at Trent. "You gave it to him didn't you? After

I said he didn't need it, you gave him a piece anyway."

Trent touched Drew's back. "Relax, Kimber, he's okay."

"Thanks to Tommy. Trent, how could you?"

"I didn't think it was that big a deal. He eats steak with us all the time. I couldn't stand having him look up at me and beg for food."

"He's your son, Trent Aaron, not a dog."

Jason and Rocky exchanged a look. Both boys wondered if they should be hearing this. Tommy was watching Kim intently.

"Kimber, I didn't mean for him to get choked. Calm down, Angel." He reached out to caress her cheek but Kim pulled away and stood.

"I'm going to go rock Drew to sleep and then change clothes. I'll be out in a little while."

Without another word, Kim disappeared into the bedroom. The door shut behind her with a small slam. They could still hear Drew crying inside. Trent looked at the others. "I'm sorry about that. I'm sure you noticed yesterday that she's a tad overprotective."

"Should one of us go check on her? She sounded really angry." Jason glanced over at the closed door. Tommy stood, ready to be the one to go to her. Trent waved them back down.

"She wasn't really angry. She was scared and mad but not angry. If I was really in the doghouse she would have used all three names on me. The fact that she only used two names means she's only annoyed and upset. Besides, you don't disturb her when she's trying to get Drew to sleep."

After about ten minutes the crying stopped but it was forty five minutes before Kim stepped out of the bedroom. She had changed out of her tan shorts and pink muscle shirt into a pair of tight pink jeans and a white sleeveless shirt that was tied at the waist and revealed a hint of her belly button. Her hair was down but pulled out of her face and clipped into place with a barrette. She didn't look at Trent as she left the bedroom. Though she had put on fresh make-up, it was clear to all four guys that she had been crying.

"Rocky, Jason, he should stay asleep the whole time we're gone. But if he should wake up you can give him some milk in his sippy cup and read to him. His books are in a pile by the bed. I have my pager so if you need me, the number is on the counter by the cell phone. Make yourselves at home."

"Don't worry about him, Kim. He'll be fine." Jason gave her a warm hug. "The question is, are you okay?"

Kim gave her oldest friend a shaky smile. "I'm fine. I guess I am more in need of this night out than I realized."

Jason kissed her cheek. "Then go have fun. Don't worry about Drew at all."

Once the two boys were alone, Rocky whistled. "Someone's going to be sleeping on the couch tonight."

Jason gave Rocky a hard look. "What's that supposed to mean? You make it sound like they are sleeping together."

Rocky shifted uncomfortably. "Jason, there is only one bedroom and only one bed."

"And right now, Drew is sleeping in it. Rocky, one thing that Kim has been adamant about for as long as I've known her is that she doesn't believe in premarital sex. That was what bothered me most about seeing Drew yesterday. Anyway, this whole conversation is none of our business."

* * *

Kim didn't say a word in the five minutes it took them to walk to the community room that was being used for the dance. Tommy wanted to reach out to her, say something to make her feel better. But with Trent right there with them, he didn't know what he could say. He vowed to get her off by herself as soon as he could to talk to her.

Inside the community room, the music was jumping and couples were already on the floor dancing. Almost on cue the DJ switched to a slow romantic ballad. Trent smiled and put his arm around her. "Excuse us, Oliver."

Trent led her to the floor and wrapped his arms around her. She remained stiff but didn't pull away. He leaned down and rested his forehead on her head. "You're not mad at me, Angel. I know you too well. Drew could have just as easily choked on that carrot you were about to give him. I don't even think you are still upset about the fact that he got choked at all. I know at the time it happened you were but not now. Now, you are embarrassed that your friends saw you wig out. It's easier to pretend to be mad at me than admit that."

Kim sighed and looked up at him, her eyes bright with tears. "You really do know me too well. I am so sorry about the way I acted. Can we forgive and forget?"

Trent brushed her lips with a slight kiss. "There is nothing to forgive and it is forgotten already."

Kim rested her head on his chest. "You know, one of these days, I'm going to lash out at you and you aren't going to be so forgiving and understanding."

Trent chuckled at how forlorn she sounded. "Maybe, but not tonight and not when I am partially to blame. I shouldn't have given him the steak after you said not to and for that, I'm sorry. Now can we put this behind us and enjoy ourselves. Evenings like tonight don't come along all that often. It's been so long since we've been dancing." He kissed her again.

Kim smiled as they broke apart. "Put what behind us?"

At the punch table, Tommy watched the couple with a frown on his

face. How long had it been since Tommy had held Kim like that? He felt a stab of jealousy watching as Trent held her close and kissed her.

Tommy knew he should be happy for his friend. Trent was a great guy and deserved the love of a wonderful woman. In any other circumstance with any other girl, Tommy would be wishing Trent the best. But this was Kim, his Kim. He couldn't just walk away without trying to win her back.

"Hey, Tommy, great race today. Aren't these dances a drag when you are away from your girl?" Bobby Mason, another racer, whistled as he spotted Trent on the dance floor. "Trent seems to be having a good time. Who's that beauty he's with?"

Tommy didn't answer right away. His eyes were on the couple in question. Trent had lifted Kim off her feet so that she could rest her head on his shoulder. He continued to sway to the music as he held her there. "That's Kim. She's his... his fiancee." He almost choked over the title.

"Lucky guy. She hasn't been around here before. I would have remembered seeing her."

"She's been away at college." Tommy explained but he wasn't really sure why he bothered.

"Trent's a better man than I. There's no way I could go on tour and leave that sweet beauty all alone."

Tommy had to agree. If he did win Kim back, he would never leave her to go on tour. Bobby grabbed a glass of punch and left Tommy alone. Tommy continued to watch Kim as the music shifted back to an upbeat tune. On the dance floor, Trent set Kim back on her feet and followed her lead in moving to the beat of the music.

Tommy loved watching Kim dance. She moved with all the grace of a gymnast and really got into the music. Her face lit up as she danced and it was obvious she was loving every minute of it. Tommy watched her as long as he could and then couldn't stand on the sidelines.

Rubbing his palms against his jeans, Tommy approached the couple and tapped Trent on the shoulder. "Hey, mind if I cut in?"

Trent smiled. "Not at all, Bro. Kim's a lot better at this than I am. I think she could stay out here all night without a break. But then again, I guess you know how she is on the dance floor." He winked at Kim. "Have fun, Angel, I'll get something to drink and call the trailer and check in with Rocky and Jason."

"Sounds great. Thanks." Standing on her tiptoes, she kissed Trent gently on the lips before turning to Tommy. "It's been a long time since we've done this."

Tommy smiled as he took her loosely in his arms. He hoped the DJ would play another slow song soon. "Too long, Kim. I didn't get much a chance to talk to you yesterday after you told me what happened."

Kim hung her head. "I know. I'm sorry, Tommy. About everything."

"I still wish you'd have called me and told me what was going on. Maybe I could have helped you."

"Which is exactly why I didn't tell you. Besides, you were a Power Ranger. You were too busy having to battle monsters to have to worry about me as well. I was going to talk to you about what Andi was going through but it seemed like every time I got ready to bring it up, your communicator would go off and you had to rush off."

"Kim, I..."

"Don't apologize, Tommy. I don't blame you. Besides you wouldn't have been able to do anything but listen anyway. I'm just saying you had a life of your own with responsibilities too important for you to abandon just because I was in a sticky situation. Part of growing up is learning that sometimes you have to give something up and make sacrifices in order to do the right thing. Sometimes accepting your responsibilities means putting your own happiness aside for the greater good."

The DJ started a song they had danced to a thousand times. Tommy mentally thanked the guy as he pulled Kim closer. Neither said a word as they swayed to the music.

* * *

"Sounds great, Jason. Thanks again. Bye." Trent hung up the phone and made his way to the punch table. As he poured himself a glass, Bobby Mason joined him. "Hey Trent. I saw you out there with your fiancee earlier. Lucky guy, she's a real looker. Where is she?"

"Dancing with Tommy Oliver. They are old friends."

Bobby looked out at the dance floor and gave a low whistle. "Close friends, I'd say. You're awfully trusting, Trent."

Trent said nothing but searched out Kim and Tommy. His heart fell as he watched them dancing. Kim's back was to his so he couldn't see her face but he recognized the undisguised look of love in Tommy's eyes. Tommy was still in love with Kim.

Trent had known it was a possibility from the moment Kim sent Tommy that letter. He had known that the day may come when Tommy would learn the truth, forgive her and want her back. But Trent had never allowed himself to think about where he would fit in all this. Who would Kim want to be with, him or Tommy? Now as Trent watched his friend and his fiancee, Trent was afraid the answer might be Tommy. He couldn't stand to think that he might lose the love of his life.

Chapter Seven

"Angel, you should go."

Kim sighed as she rinsed off the last plate and put it in the drain board. "Really, Trent, it's not that big a deal. I don't want to leave you alone so soon after I got here."

"I saw your face when Rocky said your old friends Trini and Zack were going to be there. I know you would love to spend time with them. I don't mind if you go."

This had been their topic of conversation every since Jason and Rocky had told her about the Youth Center Reunion Dance. Ernie had recently returned from overseas and had wanted to see everyone again. So he had sent out invitations to all the old regulars that he had addresses for. All of the other old Rangers were going to be there. Kim really wanted to go; she knew it would be a surprise to everyone. No one had known where she was and had had no way to contact her to tell her about the reunion. But she didn't want to go without Trent. Every since the dance two days ago, Trent had been distant. Though he still held her every night, it wasn't with the same intimacy as before.

"Come with us then. I would love for you to see where I grew up."

"I have races, Kim."

"Four races, Trent. You could miss them. Tommy is missing them so he can go."

Trent shook his head as he carefully kept his face neutral at the mention of Tommy's name. "We need the money, Kimber. I can't afford to miss four races. But I want you to go. Jason has already said you can stay with him. Go, have fun. You deserve it."

Her lower lip jutting out a little, Kim eased down on his lap. "How can I have fun if I'm missing you?" Kim nuzzled his neck and kissed him.

She certainly wasn't kissing him like someone who was in love with someone else. But Trent had no doubts that she would rather be with Tommy. He knew how much she had loved her former boyfriend. Trent would never have even had a chance with her if it hadn't been for what happened with Andi.

So many times the last couple of days, he had wanted to talk to her about it and find out for sure. He owed it to her to make her happy even if it meant losing her to Tommy. That's why he couldn't do it. If he admitted that he knew, there could be no more pretending that everything was fine. She would admit her feelings for Tommy and Trent would have to let her go.

He loved her too much to try to force her to stay where she didn't want to be but it was going to kill him to lose her. So he selfishly said nothing. Wanting to hold on to her until he had no choice, he tried to forget the look he had seen on Tommy's face the night of the dance.

"You won't miss me. You'll be having too much fun to even notice I'm not there."

Kim captured his face in her hands and forced him to look at her. "Trent, I miss you every second you are away from me. No matter what I am doing or how much fun I might be having, I feel your absence. I'm not whole unless you are by my side. So don't kid yourself thinking otherwise. I am always aware of your presence or the lack

thereof." She kissed him again. "Besides, I want my friends to meet you; to see how lucky I am."

"Kimber, Angel..."

Kim put her finger on his lips. "Shh, I understand if four races are too much for you to miss. I won't ask you to do that but I think we can compromise here. The actual dance isn't until Saturday night. Drew and I could ride with Jason and Rocky tomorrow. I can spend the week catching up with my friends while you win those first three races. Then you can leave right after the Friday night race and join me in Angel Grove so that you can be there for the dance. That would leave you only missing Saturday's race. What's one race going to mean in the long run?"

Trent groaned. How could he tell her no about anything she asked for. "Okay, I'll join you for the dance if you really want me to."

Kim grinned and kissed him again. "I really want you to."

She rested her head on his shoulder and the two sat there in the blissful silence. Kim was glad he had agreed to join her. She could feel the distance growing between them but wasn't for sure what had caused it. She wondered what was going on in Trent's mind right then. She wanted to know what was bothering him but was too afraid to ask. She was afraid that she had finally pushed him away for good. Afraid he would say that he was tired of the way she treated him every time she got upset. She didn't want to hear the words that would cut her to her very soul; that he didn't love her anymore. So she said nothing and instead listened to the steady beating of his heart.

* * *

"Okay, Slugger. Be good for Mommy. I'll see you in a few days."

"Dada, bye bye." Drew leaned toward him and gave him a wet sloppy kiss. Trent hugged him tightly and strapped him into his car seat. He was suddenly filled with a sense of dread. One that suggested that if he let Kim and Drew go to Angel Grove, he would never see them again. He dismissed the notion as a side effect of his worry that he was going to lose her to Tommy.

"Hey, do I get one of those?" Kim wrapped her arms around him.

"A sloppy Drew kiss?"

"Not quite the kiss I was thinking about." She closed her eyes and a chill ran up her spine as Trent lowered his lips to hers. Tears filled her eyes. "I miss you already."

"Don't cry, Angel. I'll see you in a few days. Enjoy visiting with your friends."

"You have the number Jason gave you for his house. I'll call you as soon as we get there. Page me?"

"Every chance I get, Angel."

He started to release her but Kim tightened her hold on him. "I love

you."

He kissed her again and then led her to the other side of the Jeep. "Go on Kimber. Rocky and Jason are waiting for you."

He closed his eyes so that he wouldn't see the hurt that he knew just filled her eyes. After a few quiet seconds, the car door closed and Rocky's Jeep pulled away. Tears streamed down his face as he could feel her getting further and further away from him.

What had he just done? Treating her like that, he was surely going to lose her. He knew suddenly without a doubt that he couldn't push her toward Tommy. He couldn't give her up. Oh, Trent knew that she might decide that she wanted to be with Tommy anyway but it wouldn't be because Trent left her no other choice. If she did choose Tommy, then he would release her from her promise to marry him but Trent couldn't release her from his heart. She was forever embedded there. Without her, Trent was nothing.

Pulling the cell phone from his back pocket and punched in a number. He could only hope he wasn't too late. After a couple of rings, an automatic voice answered. "You have reached a digital pager. After the tones, punch in your number or leave a message."

With a shaky breath, Trent waited for the tones. "I love you too, Angel. I'm sorry I let you go for even a second without saying it. Call me soon; I miss you, Kimber."

* * *

"So Trini and Zach should be arriving by plane not long after we get back to Angel Grove. I'm hoping Billy was able to arrange things so that he could make it. You did know about him going to Aquitar, didn't you, Kim?" Getting no answer, Jason looked back to where she was sitting in the back seat. She was turned to the side where he couldn't see her face but from the way her body was shaking, it was more than obvious that she was crying. "Kim, what's wrong? Rocky, pull over."

"Don't Rocko, keep going. I'm fine." Kim protested softly. She didn't want to talk about it. She couldn't explain to her two friends that she was afraid she was losing Trent and that it was slowly killing her.

Rocky glanced over at Jason. He wanted to pull over as much as Jason wanted him to but the traffic was heavy and the shoulder was too steep to risk pulling over here. Jason nodded for him to keep going as he unfastened his seat belt. Maybe Rocky couldn't stop the car but no one was going to stop him from helping his friend.

Jason eased past Rocky through the narrow opening between the front seats. He climbed into the back seat, wedging himself between Drew's car seat and his distraught friend. Despite the now crowded conditions, Jason wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close.

"Kim?"

She took a shaky breath. "I don't want to talk about it, Jase."

"So we won't talk. I just can't let you sit back here crying by yourself."

"I'm not by myself. Don't forget about Drew over there."

"I didn't forget about him. But right now he's asleep and besides that, he's a little too confined right now to be able to put his arms around you."

Kim knew how crowded the muscular boy had to be in that small space.
"You look pretty crammed in there yourself."

"I can handle it. Being a little crammed is better than sitting up there worrying about you."

Kim rested her head on Jason's shoulder. That was what she had missed most about her old friend: his gentle, comforting, non-pressuring presence. "I hope Emily knows how lucky she is."

Jason laughed, glad to see the hint of a smile pass over her face.
"She does, but it couldn't hurt if you maybe mentioned it to her while you are in Angel Grove. Trent is pretty lucky himself." He ventured carefully. He wasn't sure if this would help or make things worse.

She sniffed and shook her head. "No, I'm the lucky one. By all rights, he should have walked away from me a long time ago, but he's stuck by me through it all. Goodness knows I haven't made it easy for him."

"You never do. I remember how you pushed us all away when your parents were going through the divorce. If you've been even half as bad to him as you were to us, then I can really feel for Trent."

"Actually I've been worse. There have been so many times I couldn't stand to be around myself. I don't see how he could. But he never complained. He just took everything I threw at him and kept coming back for more. I've often wondered why."

"Probably for the same reason we did. We care about you too much to let you scare us off. What happened, Kim?"

"You saw how I treated him the other day. I wasn't mad at him; I was embarrassed that I wiggled out in front of the three of you. I apologized to Trent and I thought everything was fine but ever since then he's been distant. He didn't even tell me he loved me when I left. For over a year now, we've never said goodbye without saying those three words. I can't lose him, Jason."

Jason caught Rocky's eye in the rearview mirror. Both boys could see how much Kim truly loved Trent. Tommy was going to be in for a heartbreak. "Kim, I'm sure..."

He felt something vibrate on Kim's waist. Both looked down at the small black box at the same time. With a sniffle, Kim unclipped the pager from her waistband and looked at the readout. Her face instantly lit up as she read the message. She smiled as she showed Jason the message.

I love you too, Angel. I'm sorry I let you go for even a second without saying it. Call me soon; I miss you, Kimber.

Jason gave her shoulders a squeeze. Then he pushed a small button on the pager to save the message. "Worried over nothing, huh? Now, when you start to have your doubts, you can go back and read this message and chase them away."

* * *

Two hours later, the Jeep sped by the Welcome to Angel Grove sign. Kim felt a shiver of anticipation run up her spine at the thought of being home for the first time in three years. As good as it felt to be home, it still felt a little weird.

"So, Jason, where is everyone staying?"

Jason turned in his seat to face the back seat. He had returned to the front seat after Kim had made Rocky stop at the first store he came to. After getting Trent's page, she had wanted to call him immediately. Glad to see her happy again, Rocky would have driven her to the moon if she'd asked him to.

"My parents are out of town with my brother and sister for the whole week, so I've got plenty of empty rooms if people don't mind sharing. I thought it would be fun for all of us to stay together. Even Rocky is coming over."

Kim smiled. "Leaving one crowded house for another, Rocky?"

Rocky laughed. "Actually, I have my own apartment. When you've shared a bathroom with as many people as I have for as long as I have, you get out as soon as you can." The three friends laughed. "Hey, Kim. Do you need a crib for Drew? I think my parents still have one up in the attic. I could get it for you if you need it."

"Thanks for the offer, Rocky but Drew likes to climb out of cribs too much. He's been in a regular bed since he was fourteen months old. That's when he climbed out of his crib for the first time that we know of and proceeded to turn over our fish tank in the living room.. He can share a bed with me like he's been doing at the trailer."

Rocky pulled into Jason's driveway and parked. "Here we are at Casa Scott. I'll grab your bag while you get Drew. He's been asleep this whole time; I don't want to be the one to wake him."

Kim laughed. "This is a common ritual. Drew falls asleep whenever a car is in motion, no matter how long the trip is. He wakes up on his own as soon as the car is turned off. He didn't wake up when we stopped at the store because you left the car running."

Sure enough, now that the engine was off, Drew opened his eyes and smiled at the three adults. Kim carried him inside and set him on the floor. She did a quick scan for any hazards but decided Jason's house was pretty Drew-proofed. The two year old ran from room to room, investigating every nook and cranny. Rocky set her bag inside the door.

"Okay, I have to get to the airport. Trini, Zack, Kat and Aisha should be getting in within the next hour. Are we going out tonight or what? I can swing by my house and see if one of my sister will watch Drew if we want to go out."

Jason caught the pensive look on Kim's face and smiled. He realized she was worried about leaving Drew alone on his first night in a new place. "Everyone's going to be pretty wiped out from traveling. Why don't we stay in and get caught up on what's been going on with everyone?"

"I can cook supper if Jason will make a grocery run for anything he doesn't already have."

Rocky shook his head. "Kim a cook, boggles the mind doesn't it?"

"I had to learn in order to survive. Unless it's something prepared on the grill, Trent is useless in the kitchen but he has an appetite to rival Rocky's. Before you go, Rocky, there's a favor I want to ask both of you. I know Tommy told you guys the truth about Donavon and Andi and what happened to make me Drew's mom. I don't mind that you know but I don't want everyone to know the truth. It's not that I don't trust the rest of the gang; but I think its better if all they know is that Drew is my son."

Jason rubbed her arm. "He is your son, Kim, in all the ways that are important you are his mother. How that came to be is no one's business unless you want it to be. They won't hear it from us."

Kim smiled. "Thanks guys."

* * *

"Ace, doggie." Drew came up to Kim carrying a framed photograph. Kim pulled him up on her lap and took the picture from him. She smiled. It was a picture of Jason when he was in eighth grade. With him in the picture was a larger German Shepherd. Her eyes misted up as she remembered how close Jason had been to that dog.

"That was Jason's dog Dusty."

"Doggie here?"

"No, Dusty doesn't live here anymore.' She said no more about it to Drew but she bitterly remembered the day that Jason's neighbor had hit the dog with his car two months after that picture had been taken. Jason had been so hurt at losing his canine friend, so hurt that Kim had carried ill feelings toward Jason's neighbor for the longest time after that. "Why don't you play with your toys? Want Mama to play blocks with you?"

She could imagine what Jason would say if he returned from the grocery store to find her on the floor of his living room playing with Drew and smiled. Both Jason and Rocky seemed to be getting a kick out of seeing her as a mom. She returned the photograph to the shelf and settled on the floor with her son.

She was in the middle of building a tower for Drew to knock over when the doorbell rang. She kissed the top of Drew's head and went to

answer the door. Pulling open the heavy oak door, she squealed with delight when she saw who was standing there.

"Billy!" She threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly.

The former Blue Ranger stood there for a second stunned. But as the shock wore off, he smiled and returned the hug. "Kim, how? Nobody's heard a peep from you in two years."

"I ran into Tommy, Rocky and Jason at the race track a few days ago. They told me about the reunion. You look great. Come on in; Jason is at the grocery store but he should be back really soon."

Grabbing his hand, she pulled him into the house and closed the door behind them. Billy couldn't take his eyes off her. He couldn't believe she was there. "Kim, did something happen in Florida? That letter you sent Tommy was so unlike you. I tried to call you at the training center but they said you had abruptly left. I was worried that Mondo had done something to you so I ran scan after scan searching for you. Zordon assured me that you were okay but I sensed he was hiding something."

Kim bit her lip. "Wow, you were that worried about me? The other didn't tell me you did all that."

"They don't know. So, did something happen?"

Just then from the living room came a small crash and a delighted squeal. Kim smiled as she realized that Drew had knocked over the block tower she had made before Billy's arrival. Billy looked puzzled as he followed Kim the rest of the way into the living room.

"You could say that."

"Mama, do it again."

Billy stood there stunned once again as Kim settled back on the floor with Drew in her lap. She ruffled the toddler's hair before she started rebuilding a tower. Billy shook his head and sank to the floor beside them. "Did he say Mama?"

Kim smiled patiently and nodded. "Billy Cranston meet my son Drew. Drew, can you say hi to Billy?"

"Hi, 'ly."

"Bil-ly." Kim corrected him with a smile.

"B'ly." Drew stirred again. He gave Billy his biggest smile. Kim laughed out loud and hugged Drew.

"Close enough for a two year old, I guess. Billy, don't look at me like that."

"No wonder Zordon looked so worried. Why didn't you tell us?"

Kim sighed. "Too much was going on. I didn't know what you guys would think of me. There are probably a hundred thousand reason that I came up with for not calling. Billy, my mom doesn't even know about Drew. Maybe I'll tell her about him after the wedding."

Billy stared at her, intently searching her face for any sign that all was not right. "You're engaged, too? Who is he, Drew's father?"

Kim nodded. "His name is Trent Connerey and he's the most wonderful man in the world. He'd have to be to put up with me for as long as he has. He'd be here now if he didn't have so many races this week. That's how I ran into Tommy, Jason, and Rocky." She gave that a second to sink in.

"You'll like him, Billy. He'll be here for the dance Saturday night. But enough about me. What's this about you living on Aquitar? I know you got over your fear of water after you battled Rita's fish monster but I still can't picture you living on a water planet like Aquitar. She must be pretty special."

Billy blushed. "Tommy and the others told you about Cestria, huh?"

Kim reached out and touched his knee. "Nope, you did. I can still read you like a book, Billy. You've got that look in your eye. That same look you got in fifth grade when you fell head over hills for Melissa Halliday. The one you had in eighth grade when you and Sara Meeks went steady. Do I even have to mention Laura and Violet? You had the same look with them that you have now with Cestria."

"You make it sound like I'm always falling for some girl."

Kim laughed. "I hardly call 5 girls in nineteen years always falling for girls. So is Cestria her?" As she talked she was automatically stacking block on top of block, building a new tower. Drew only let her get it five blocks high before he knocked it over. Drew giggled and tried to build it back himself.

"Her who?"

"The one who makes you complete. You remember when my parents were divorcing and I was so sure I would never trust love enough to risk my heart? You told me that a day would come when I met the one person who held a missing piece of my heart. You said once I met him I would feel complete and would know without a doubt that he was the one. So is Cestria the one who completes you?"

Billy smiled as Drew handed him several blocks. He sat there for a minute intent on building his own tower for Drew. Finally he looked at Kim, his blue eyes wistful. "I don't know. I do know that I am happy on Aquitar. I'm learning things I would never learn here on Earth even if Zordon were still here to share his vast knowledge. And I'm really happy with Cestria. She may very well be the one but we are taking things slow."

"That's the best way to do it." Kim agreed with him.

"Turn about's fair play." Billy warned her. "What about Trent? I know you are engaged to him but is he yours?"

Kim nodded. "He really is. I've never felt this way about anyone, not even Tommy. It's like my body is in tune with Trent. At home, I work in a gym coaching some gymnastic classes. I was there right before

Spring Break teaching a class. My back was to the door but all of a sudden, I just knew Trent was standing there watching me. It was crazy because he was supposed to be in Arizona. I wasn't expecting him in until late the next day. But I turned around and there he was. I know when he walks in the room because there is a piece of me that's missing except for when he is with me."

"Then I'm glad you found him."

The front door opened and Jason entered with several grocery bags. "Honey, I'm home." He called out jokingly.

"Great, put the groceries away and come see who's here." Kim joked back before getting up to help him.

Kim left Billy and Jason in the living room with Drew while she put the groceries away. She couldn't help but wonder what all questions Billy was asking Jason about her. She also wondered what Jason would tell him. She wasn't worried. She knew that Jason wouldn't say anything about what happened and she thought Jason had liked Trent.

Once the groceries were put away, Kim stepped to the doorway and watched as Jason and Billy both were engrossed in building with Drew's blocks. They were so engrossed that neither boy had noticed that Drew wasn't even paying them any attention. Instead he was walking toward her with his left thumb in his mouth and his fingers crooked over his nose. His eyes were heavy and she knew if he got still for half a second, he would be asleep.

With a smile, Kim held her arms out for him to come to her. He smiled around his thumb and allowed her to scoop him up. He pulled his thumb out just long enough to kiss her cheek before plucking it right back in his mouth.

She continued to stand there holding him even after he was asleep. Neither boy had even noticed that Drew was nowhere around. She stifled a laugh. "Entertaining Drew, guys?"

"Of course we are, Kim. Right Drew?" Only then did Jason look around for Drew. Kim saw his eyes grow wide when he didn't see him. Billy looked to her first and was relieved to see her holding Drew. He motioned for Jason to look.

"Um, how long has he been asleep?" The former Blue Ranger asked.

"About five minutes but the two of you had lost his attention way before that. Don't worry, I've seen Trent do the same thing. Jason, which room did you put my stuff in?"

"The guest room down the hall. I figured you wouldn't want to take any chances with Drew and the stairs."

"You are right about that. Thanks." They heard Rocky's Jeep pull into the driveway. "Rocky's back with the others. I'll be out as soon as I get Drew settled."

Kim disappeared down the hall as the doorbell chimed. Drew whimpered and clutched her arm tightly as Zack's enthusiastically greeted Billy

and Jason. Kim took extra time in putting him down to make sure he was soundly back to sleep. When she felt it was safe to leave him, she kissed his forehead and backed out of the room.

Kim stood hidden just inside the hallway for more than a minute as she observed her friends. Trini and Zack were in one corner talking to Jason. Kim could only guess they were filling him in on the things he had missed since leaving the Peace Conference. Kat, Billy, Rocky and Aisha were sitting on the couch animatedly talking as well.

Zack noticed her first. His mouth dropped open as he ignored the question Jason had just asked him. "Kim?" He grinned and ran to her, picking her up and swinging her around. "Man, it's good to see you."

Suddenly the others converged on Kim in a sea of hugs. Despite her genuine happiness at seeing her old friends, Kim couldn't help but cast a furtive glance back to the bedroom, worried that the noisy greeting may have woken Drew. Jason and Rocky noticed her concern; while Rocky steered the group back toward the middle of the room, Jason quickly headed down the hall to check on the toddler.

"Kim, where have you been? I've tried and tried to get in touch with you." Trini squeezed Kim's hand.

"I'm living in Waco, Texas." She glanced back at Jason who had returned to the living room. He gave her a thumbs up to let her know that Drew was fine. She smiled her thanks.

Zack frowned. "Wasn't that where that cult was a few years ago? The one that the government had the stand off with?"

"Yeah but it is also home to Baylor University where I've been a student for the last year and a half."

"That's great, Kim." Aisha shook her head. "But you still could have let someone know how to find you. Waco does have a post office and telephone company, doesn't it?"

"Hey, Kat, how is England?:" Rocky stepped in to get the attention off Kim. She flashed him a grateful smile.

"It's beautiful but I've missed being here. It's good to be home even if it's just for a visit."

Zack, Trini, Billy, and Aisha echoed the sentiment. Kim didn't respond. As great as it was to be here surrounded by most of her best friends ever, she missed Trent. She wished he was with her right then.

"So I say we head to the Youth Center. I can't wait to see the place. Can you believe I've even missed Bulk and Skull?" Zack laughed.

"Actually, Kim was going to cook supper for us all. She even got me to go to the grocery store. My mom is going to be shocked that I even knew where the store was."

Aisha raised an eyebrow. "Since when can you cook? You lived with me,

remember? I've tasted your cooking."

Kim laughed good-naturedly. "You'd be surprised at what all's changed since then."

"So what's on the menu?" Kat inquired.

"Tacos Caliente."

Rocky's eyes lit up as he recognized the Spanish word. "Hot Tacos? What's in them?"

Jason gently rubbed Kim's shoulders. "If everything she put on the list earlier for me to pick up is going into it, you don't want to know."

"Actually the things on the list were just the things I didn't see when I looked through the cabinets. There were several things that your mom already had."

Jason whistled. "I think we are going to need fire extinguishers."

Kim laughed. "Just really big glasses of tea. A friend of mine from college gave me the recipe. The first time she made them I went through four glasses of water for one taco. But that didn't stop me from eating two more tacos before the meal was over. But if anyone is against spicy food, just let me know and I'll make some regular taco meat as well." She would have to make some for Drew anyway. There were no other takers.

Rocky shook his head. "I'm not worried. Spicy food doesn't bother me at all."

"Keep thinking that, Rocko. Just keep thinking that."

Jason looked around. "Okay, here's how I thought we'd split the rooms. Trini and Kat, you can use my parent's bedroom down here. Aisha, you and Tanya can share my sister's room upstairs. Zack and Billy, if you don't mind bunk beds, you can share my brother's room. That would leave the upstairs guest room for Rocky and Adam and my room for Tommy and me. We'll be crowded but at least we'll all be together."

Before anyone could say anything about Kim's lack of a roommate, Tommy entered the house with Adam and Tanya. Once again, there was a noisy reunion. Everyone, except Rocky, Jason, and Billy watched to see how Kim and Tommy would react to each other. They were surprised when they greeted each other like friends who had just seen each other the day before rather than as a former couple who hadn't seen each other in years.

Suddenly, Aisha frowned. "Do I hear a baby crying?"

The others looked at Aisha like she was crazy until they too heard the sound of crying coming closer and closer. Kim bit her lip and started toward the guest room. Drew entered the living room before she took three steps. His face was splotchy from crying and his lower lip was quivering.

"Mama?"

Kim ran to him as he searched for her in the crowd of strangers. As she scooped him up in her arms and tried to reassure him, the others stared at her. Never in a thousand years had they expected this.

Adam found his voice first. "Did we miss something?"

"Did he call her mama?" Zack added.

Kim spared her friends only the briefest moment of attention.
"Everyone, this is Drew, my son."

2. The Choices She Makes

> <meta name="Generator"> Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight

"Hey, Kim, you need a hand?" Tommy stood in the kitchen doorway watching her as she stirred the taco meat in a large skillet.

She flashed him a small smile. "I'm just about through now. What's Drew doing?" After the two year old had been woken from his nap, Kim had spent over an hour trying to get him back down but Drew refused to go back to sleep. Though he was irritable and cranky for having had his nap interrupted he had a room full of attentive newcomers to check out and he wasn't about to miss a moment of it. Kim consoled herself with the knowledge that the lack of nap would mean he was going to bed earlier than usual.

"He's enjoying being the center of attention."

Kim smiled a little bigger. "He gets that from Trent."

"Seems like I remember you always liking the spotlight as well." Tommy joked back. "Right now, Aisha, Trini, and Tanya are spoiling him like there's no tomorrow. The guys meanwhile are busy playing with his toys."

Kim laughed. "I'm not surprised. I've already caught Billy and Jason building with Drew's blocks."

Tommy grew serious as Kim eased by him to get the colander from the cabinet. As she drained the excess liquid out of the taco meat, Tommy fixed her in his gaze. "Jason told me you didn't want the others to know the truth about Drew's parentage. I won't say a word if you don't want me to, but Kim, I think you are making a mistake."

"It's my mistake to make, Tommy." She sighed as she put the bowl of meat on the counter with the toppings she had already prepared. She turned to the sink to wash up some of the mess she had made. "Trent and I have talked about this over and over again. Right now, Drew isn't old enough to understand what happened but one day he is. It's going to be hard enough explaining to him that while Trent and I love him very much, we aren't his real parents and that his real father murdered his real mother. We don't want to have to worry about him finding out from anyone other than the two of us. I trust everyone in

this house with my life but this secret is too big to tell everyone."

"But you have to know what they are thinking."

Kim matched his gaze. "That I'm a cheating slut who slept with the first guy who came along when I reached Florida. Either that or they're thinking I'm a heartless witch for keeping your child a secret from you." She took a deep breath and continued before Tommy could protest. "Okay, they are my friends, they won't put it quite that harshly but that's the essence of what they are thinking. I know because that's what Jason and Rocky were thinking the moment they saw Drew. And don't try to deny that you weren't thinking the first one because you more or less said it to my face."

"Kim, I ..."

She stopped him with a shake of her head. "It's okay. I can handle it, Tommy. I've grown past the need to have people think only the best of me just for the sake of looking good. I know the truth about Drew; Trent knows the truth and one day so will Drew. I told you because you deserved to know for your peace of mind. That's all that really matters, Tommy. Don't worry, I'll make sure they all know that Trent is Drew's father."

"I don't mind if they think I'm the father."

Kim laughed and spooned up a small plateful of meat from a second bowl of meat. "Don't be silly, Tommy. I think they've had enough of surprises for one visit. Before Trent gets here, I want them to know all about him."

She opened the freezer and set the plate on a shelf. Tommy frowned; she must be more frazzled than she wanted to let on. "Kim, that is the freezer."

She smiled patiently. "I know. It's the quickest way to cool off Drew's food before he gets a hold of it. He's not exactly patient about waiting once he's seen it. Tell everyone to come fix their plate while I pour the drinks."

As they lined up to the counter to make their tacos, Adam laughed when he saw the huge glasses she was filling. "Those glasses going to be big enough, Kim?"

Kim gave the glasses in question a once over. "No, but they're the biggest ones Jason has. Don't worry, I'll put the pitcher on the table for quick refills."

Adam laughed again. He didn't believe for a second the tacos could be as hot as Kim was making them out to be. Kim said nothing more. He would find out soon enough.

She took Drew's plate from the freezer and tested the meat. Satisfied it was cool enough, she topped the meat with tomatoes and cheese. As she carried the plate to the living room, Drew ran to her, eager to eat. He followed her to the table. Seeing two big phone books in one of the chairs, Kim smiled. Jason would make a good father some day. She sat the plate on the table and helped Drew up in his chair before turning back to the line to fix her own plate.

Rocky watched as the toddler shoveled bite after bite into his mouth without incident. He smiled. 'Caliente, huh?' He thought. 'Right, not the way Drew is eating.' Opening his mouth, he took a huge bite out of his taco. Immediately, his mouth felt like it was on fire.

Kim laughed as she returned to the table with her plate. Rocky had already drained his glass and was reaching for the pitcher with a shaky hand. She helped him refill his glass much the way she was used to doing for Drew. "You okay, Rocky? I thought spicy food didn't bother you."

The former Red/Blue Ranger nodded. "This is beyond spicy; this is more along the lines of flames of Hell. What's in these things? And how is Drew eating them like he is?"

Kim's eyes widened as she realized what Rocky had thought and felt only the tiniest spark of pity. "Drew is eating regular taco meat. Give me some credit, Rocky. His stomach couldn't handle the spices. By the way, there is more regular meat in the kitchen if anyone doesn't like these. As for what's in them, Rocky; don't ask. When Maria first told me I almost couldn't eat them again." She took a regular size bite. Though her mouth burned and she longed to quench the fire with the cool liquid refreshment, Kim forced herself not to take a drink. It earned her a glare from Rocky which was the reaction she was hoping for.

The others learned from Rocky's mistake and took small cautious bites. By the time everyone was halfway through their first taco, Kim had excused herself to get a second pitcher of tea from the refrigerator. While in the kitchen, Kim eased her burning mouth with an ice cube. Once the worst of the fire had been extinguished, Kim returned to the table.

As Tommy drained his third glass of tea, he shot Kim a disbelieving look. "Kim, I've eaten a lot of spicy food in my life without batting an eye but Rocky's right, these are beyond spicy. They're great but hot; yet you are still are on your first glass of tea. You're eating a regular taco aren't you?"

Kim laughed. If only he knew how much will power it had taken her not to abandon her glass and go straight for the pitcher itself. "Would you like to try mine?" She held up her taco invitingly. Tommy bit into it and his eyes watered. When he could speak again, he shook his head. "How do you do it?"

Deciding she had tortured them and her mouth enough, Kim took a long drink of her tea, draining the last half of the glass in one long swallow. Setting the glass back down she grinned. "I confess, they kill my mouth too but after what happened to Rocky, I couldn't resist. I knew it would drive him crazy to think I wasn't fazed."

Zack laughed. "Our Kim with a wicked streak. Where did this warped sense of humor come from?"

"From Andi." Six pairs of eyes watched her. She realized they had instantly thought Andi was a guy and maybe Drew's father. "She was my roommate in Florida. She was this real calm sedate person until she pulled a practical joke. Then you'd better watch out. Once, everyone

was on edge because Coach was really drilling us hard. Things were so tense that something had to be done before we all snapped. So, Andi sent Coach a singing telegram. You should have seen everyone's face when the guy in a gorilla suit showed up at the gym and sang the Banana Boat song to Coach." Kim smiled at the memory. "I guess she rubbed off on me. These last two years raising Drew, that sense of humor has come in handy. I sometimes think that it's the only thing that's kept me sane."

Picking up her napkin, she wiped Drew's hands and mouth and helped to the floor. With a hug, she sent him off to play with his toys while everyone else finished eating. Trini waited until the toddler was out of the room before broaching the topic on everyone's mind.

"Kim, who is Drew's father? Where is he?"

Kim laughed. "I was wondering when that was going to come up. Andi's brother Trent is Drew's father and my fiancÃ©. Right now he is getting ready to win a race. You'll get to meet him before the dance. He's a great guy."

Kat stole a sideways look to see how Tommy was taking the news. The tall blonde knew this had to be hurting Tommy terribly. Even now she could tell he was having to force a smile.

"Well, if he's getting ready to win, it's only because I'm not there to beat him." He looked at the others. "That's how we met up with Kim again. I've known Trent for months now but never realized who he was engaged to until Kim showed up at the racetrack."

Kim laughed. "My, we are cocky tonight. I seem to remember Trent being in the winner's circle the last two races I saw. Jason, Rocky, isn't that what you saw?"

"She's got a point, Tommy. I mean, the races were close but he did beat you." Rocky affirmed.

Tommy smiled as he stood to take his plate to the kitchen. "I let him win."

"Ha, you wish, Oliver." Kim countered.

"It's true. I had to let him look good in front of you."

Nobody else said a word as they helped to carried their plates to the counter. They were surprised to see the former couple lapsing so easily back into an easy banter. Jason, however, hated to see it because he knew it would get Tommy's hopes up that he still had a chance with Kim.

"Who's going to do the dishes?" Jason interrupted.

Trini and Aisha exchanged a look. They were both eager to question their friend without the boys around. "We'll make you a deal. We girls will do the dishes tonight if you do them the next meal we eat in."

"I'm game. I know how bad this stuff stains. I don't want Mrs. Scott coming after me. You girls have fun." Rocky assured them.

Zack jabbed Jason in the arm. "Hey, Man, you still have that basketball goal in the back?"

"Yeah, we can go three on three. After the girls finish, they can join us."

Tommy looked back at Kim. This could be a good time to show her that he was good with kids. "Can Drew come out with us? I promise I'll keep a close eye on him."

That wicked streak Zack had commented on earlier resurfaced and she smiled devilishly. "Drew, come here."

After a second, the two year old answered his mom's call. She knelt down to his eye level. "Want to go outside and play ball with the guys?"

Drew's eyes lit up. "Ball. 'side. Play."

Tommy picked the two year old up. "Okay, little man, let's go play ball."

Kim waited until the guys were safely outside before shaking her head. Tanya looked at her. "What's wrong? Don't you trust them with Drew?"

"Oh yeah. Rocky and Jason have already baby-sat for me a couple of times at the racetrack and Drew was none the worse for wear. But I think all six of them are going to regret Tommy asking to take him out real quickly. They don't know what they are in for. Drew just heard three of his favorite words: play, ball, and outside. They'll be screaming for relief soon."

Kat frowned. "We'd better get to those dishes. Rocky's right, they will stain."

"All that's really left is the plates we ate on. I usually clean as I cook. It's easier that way with a child. And if we rinse the plates in cold water before we wash them the stain should come right off. Maria taught me that tidbit when she gave me the recipe."

In the kitchen they learned that Kim was right, there wasn't much left to do. Aisha started to dry the pots and pans already in the drain board while Kat and Tanya began to rinse off the plates and stack them in the sink. Kim went to the counter and busied herself with finding tops and covers for the bowls of left over food. Trini put an arm around the petite girl's shoulders.

"Okay, Kim, we want to know all about you and Trent. How did you two meet?"

Kim sighed. She should have known there was a motive behind Trini volunteering them for clean up. "Like I said, his sister was my roommate. She introduced us."

Tanya leaned against the counter as she waited for Kat to hand her a plate to rinse. "What does she say about you two being together?"

"She never knew. At first, Trent and I weren't even friends." Kim

struggled not to cry. "Andi died and I guess you could say her death is what brought us together."

Aisha could tell Kim was trying to keep the tears from forming. "It's too bad she never got a chance to know Drew."

Kim forced a smile. "Not a day goes by that I don't think that. It's hard on Trent. Except for Drew, Andi was the last of his family. Their parents died in a car accident seven years ago. Losing his sister on top of that was devastating to him."

"But he has you and Drew." Trini smiled.

"Yeah, when we can be together. He's been on the circuit for the last year so we only get to see each other at holidays. But it pays good money, enough to pay the rent and my tuition. He's hoping he'll have made enough by the end of the circuit that he can quit. When school starts back, he wants to try to get a job with university security so we can be together."

"When are you getting married?"

"We haven't set a date but we want to be married before the end of summer."

"Why have you waited?" Kat handed the last plate to Tanya and folded her arms across her chest.

Kim frowned. How could she explain it to them in a way that would be telling the truth but make sense since they thought they had conceived Drew? "I don't know. We haven't wanted to rush into things. I guess because of my parents' divorce I want to make doubly sure before I make that big of a commitment. We wanted to be sure we were marrying because we truly love each other not because we feel obligated because of Drew."

"How did he propose?" Aisha asked as they went into the living room.

Kim let the memory wash over her as she checked on Drew through the sliding glass door. "It was so sweet. It was just before dark on Christmas day. We put Drew down early because he had been going hard all day, excited about all the gifts he had gotten. Trent asked Maria to come over and baby-sit. He wouldn't tell me where we were going; all he would say was that he had one more gift he wanted to give me. Now, December in Waco usually isn't known for it's extremely cold Decembers but a freak snow storm a couple of days before had given us the closet thing to a white Christmas that I've ever seen. Trent drove me out to a ranch owned by one of the coaches at the gym I work at. There was a horse and sleigh waiting on us. We rode through the woods until we got to this clearing complete with a gazebo. Coach Dermott had decorated it to look really special. Trent had made this tape of slow romantic songs and we danced. Even though the temperature was hovering near freezing, I didn't feel the cold. It seemed like hours and no time at all had passed when the tape ended. Even then we didn't release each other.

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** "Kim, this past year and a half has been incredible. With each day

that goes by I love you more and more. I don't know how I survived before you came along. But now that you have, I don't want a day to go by without you in my life."

Sinking down to one knee, Trent slipped her glove off her left hand and kissed her chilled knuckles. Reaching into his coat pocket, Trent pulled out a small ring box.

Her heart skipped a beat and tears filled her eyes as Kim realized what he was about to do. Her now bare hand was shaking, not from the cold but in anticipation of what was to come. Trent slipped the small engagement ring on her finger.

"Kimberly Ann Hart, you will make me the happiest man on earth if you'll say you'll marry me."

Too overcome to force sound past the lump in her throat, Kim simply nodded. Dropping down to her knees, Kim threw her arms around his neck. She kissed him softly.

"You said yes? Thank you. If you had said no..."

"How could I say no?" Kim found her voice at last. "You make me me. Without you, I'm not a whole person. I love you, Trent Aaron Connerey and I would be honored to be your wife. **

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Trini had tears in her eyes. "That's so romantic." Aisha an Tanya echoed the sentiment. None of the girls had noticed that sometime in the middle of Kim's story Kat had left the room.

"Yeah," Kim agreed with them softly. In her mind she could still see the rest of what happened in the gazebo but she said nothing. That was a special memory meant only for Trent and Kim. "I can't wait for all of you to meet him. Now, I better get out there and rescue those boys from my son. They may be used to battling monsters but they probably have met their match with mine."

"You should have seen him, Trent. He was so cute chasing after that ball. He thought he was just another one of the guys. He'd get the ball and yell 'Ace, Ace' and wait for Jason to pick him up so he could dunk the ball in the net." Kim smiled into the phone at the memory.

Trent chuckled warmly in her ear. "Ace? He calls Jason 'Ace'?"

"Un huh. He has renamed all the guys. Rocky is now Wocket; Billy, B'ly; Zack, Ack; Adam, 'dm; and Tommy, Me. Jason is convinced that he is Drew's favorite because he has the 'cool' name. I don't have the heart to tell him that Drew is trying to call him Jase like we do but can't quite make the J sound."

"He probably wouldn't believe it anyway."

"Point. Anyway, Drew was so worn out that he was in bed sound asleep by seven thirty."

"Everything's going okay there, then?"

"Except that I miss you like anything. I can't wait for you to get here."

"I'll be there soon. I miss you, too. I've got a race tomorrow night so I'll page you when I'm free and then you can call me whenever you get a moment."

"Sounds great." Kim glanced up as Kat entered the living room. Giving the tall blonde a welcoming smile, Kim turned her attention back to the phone. "Be careful racing tomorrow. I don't want anything to happen to you."

"Nothing is going to happen except I'm going to win. I love you, Angel."

Kim closed her eyes and for a minute she could almost feel Trent's arms around her. "I love you, too. I don't want to hang up. I don't want to go join Drew in that lonely bedroom."

"At least you'll have Drew with you. I knew I was going to get used to holding you in my arms at night. I don't want to hang up either but I bet you are as worn out as our son was. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

Reluctantly, they said their good-byes and Kim hung up the phone. Wiping at her eyes, Kim twisted on the couch to look at Kat. The tall blonde had perched on a nearby chair and didn't look happy.

Kim bit her lip. "Kat, is everything okay? You've been so quiet all evening."

Kat shot her a look of almost pure hostility. "No, Kim, everything is not okay. Things haven't been okay since you sent Tommy that letter. Do you realize how much you hurt him?"

Kim picked up a throw pillow from beside her and hugged it to her. She had figured that if there were anyone else she would have to answer to about the letter, it would be Kat. Kim nodded. "As much as it hurt me to write and send it, probably more so. I had no choice though; I had to think of Drew."

"And that's another thing, Kim. I can't believe you showed up here like this with a child. Everyone is acting like it so cool that you are a mother but I can't. Honestly, Kim, did you even stop to think about how this would make Tommy feel? You had another man's baby." Kat shook her head, hostility now mixing with pain and loneliness. "I can't believe how wrong I was about you."

Kim drew her knees up. She owed it to Kat to sit here and listen to her vent. Two years ago Kim wouldn't have been able to face Kat's icy anger. But she had to face the consequences of her actions. No matter how noble they had been, people had still been hurt.

Seeing that Kim wasn't going to say anything, Kat continued. "I gave you the benefit of the doubt when Tommy got that letter. I didn't believe for one second you had found someone else. You and Tommy were too close for something like that. I wasn't sure what was going on but I knew that letter was a cover-up."

Kim blanched. How could Kat have known that?

"Don't look so surprised, Kim. We may not have known each other long when you gave me your powers but I thought we had gotten to know each other pretty well. I thought maybe you had gotten scared that the distance would be too great for your love to survive. Maybe because of your parents divorce you were afraid that Tommy would end up hurting you so you hurt him first."

Kat looked away, her eyes full of tears. "I even came up with some pretty wild explanations. Maybe Coach Schmidt made you break up with him or maybe someone on the team who had a crush on you sent the letter to break you and Tommy up. Then when it seemed like Tommy was starting to have feelings for me, I came up with the wildest theory of all. I decided that maybe you had given Tommy just so he could be with me. But I was wrong. With all the theories and reasonable rationalizations, the truth of the matter was exactly like you said in your letter. There was another guy all along."

Kim pulled a couple of tissues from the box on the coffee table and then offered the box to Kat. The blonde ignored the friendly gesture so Kim set the box on the couch within Kat's reach. Kim wiped at her eyes. "You were partially right, Kat. I knew you would be there for Tommy. I had seen how much you liked him and I hoped he would turn to you for comfort in getting over the hurt. Tommy deserved to be happy and I was sure you were the one who could do it."

Kat scowled. "How nice of you. Tommy and I were happy. When he was with me, he forgot all about you. Especially when we made love."

From the way Kat flung the statement out, it was clear she hoped to hurt her predecessor. Kim ducked her head. There was a time not that long ago when hearing that Tommy and Kat had slept together would have hurt her terribly even though she had given Tommy up. But that had been before Drew's first birthday when she realized Trent was the man she loved.

"Kat don't do this to yourself."

"Why, can't you handle the truth? You didn't want him, you were too busy sleeping with Trent to give Tommy any consideration at all. Answer me this, what did Trent have that Tommy didn't that made him a more appealing lover? Trent must have done something to get you over your sexual hangups in a hurry. That's right, Kim, Tommy told me all about how you would freeze up every time he even mentioned the two of you having sex."

This time Kim did react as if she had been struck. That was uncalled for. She couldn't believe Tommy had talked about her while he and Kat had made love. She thought he had understood her reasons for not wanting to go too far too soon. Her decision not to sleep with Tommy or Trent for that matter had nothing to do with any hangups as Kat put it. She had merely made a decision long ago to wait for her wedding night. She had explained that to Tommy the first time they had almost got carried away. She longed to explain it to Kat now, but she knew that it would sound phony and unconvincing since they all believed she and Trent were sleeping together. So instead, Kim tried to compose herself and think of a suitable reply.

"I'm not going to answer that, Kat. Not because I can't but because I choose not to give you an answer. My love life is not your concern, neither is yours mine. Besides, out of anyone you should be the most happy that I broke up with Tommy."

"Happy? How could I be happy? You broke his heart. It took him months to reach a point where he trusted me enough to ask me out. But even then he didn't trust me enough not to break up with him. That's why when I found out I was going to England, Tommy decided we should just be friends. That way our friendship was intact and he didn't have to worry about me finding someone else and doing to him what you did. Kim, I loved Tommy; I would never be that cruel and heartless to him. But in the end that didn't matter because I lost him anyway."

"Never say never Kat. Two years ago I didn't believe there was anything in the world that would have made me give Tommy up. But sometimes things happen that change everything. You asked me earlier if I had given any thought to what it would do to Tommy to find out about Drew. Kat, I didn't think Tommy would ever have to find out. I didn't know he was going to be at that racetrack with Trent. But he was and we've talked. He understands what happened and he forgave me for what I did. He and I are friends again. I am sorry for what happened and I hope you can forgive me too."

Kat rolled her eyes and stood. Walking over to the sliding glass door, she stared out into the darkness. "I don't suppose you really care if I forgive you or not. All you care about is making Kim happy."

Kim sighed. This was even harder than talking to Tommy had been. "That's not true, Kat. I do care about yours and Tommy's feelings but I can't force you to forgive me and I can't change what happened. The only thing we can change is right now. Kat, try to work things out with Tommy. Maybe it will work this time."

Kat turned to face Kim, her blue eyes haunted. "You make it sound so easy. You know that I don't have a chance with Tommy. The same problem is there."

Kim shook her head. "No, it's not. Like I said, Tommy and I talked. I told him things I can't tell anyone else. Things are different now."

Kat rubbed her arms wearily. "The most important thing is still the same. I don't have a chance with Tommy because he still loves you."

Kim joined Kat at the window and made the tall blonde look at her. "You're wrong Kat. Tommy knows I'm happy with Trent. I'm getting married within the next two months. Tommy is not still in love with me."

"You don't really believe that do you? All you have to do is look at Tommy to see that he still loves you. Heaven only knows what he might still see in a two-bit slut like you but he does." Kat shook her head, obviously disgusted. "You know what Kim, you aren't even worth fighting with. I'm going to bed."

Kim stood there long after Kat disappeared into Jason's parent's

bedroom. Kim was shaking more from the implication Kat had brought up than from her harsh words. Kat was wrong; she had to be. Tommy wasn't in love with her still. He couldn't be. She believed that with her whole heart. She had no choice but to believe that.

Tommy didn't still love her because she didn't love him. She couldn't feel for anyone else what she felt for Trent. Therefore, Kat was wrong.

'You hope she's wrong,' an inner voice told her. 'Because you know that if she's not then you are going to break his heart all over again. Are you ready to do that?'

With a sigh, Kim left the living room to join Drew in the bedroom. As she changed into her gown and slipped under the covers she had to admit the answer was no. Though she didn't love Tommy anymore, part of her would always care for him deeply. She couldn't hurt him a second time.

**

Chapter Nine

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'Mm, smells great.' Jason smiled as he snatched a still warm chocolate chip cookie from the cooling rack.

Trini slapped his hand. "Those are for dessert. Why aren't you outside playing ball with Billy, Rocky, Adam, and Zack?"

"Without Tommy, the teams wouldn't be even."

Aisha checked on the pan of cookies in the oven and straightened. "I noticed him playing with Drew. What's up with that?"

Tanya stopped stirring the cookie dough for a minute. "Does he still have a thing for Kim? That's how he's acting but come on, Kim's engaged."

"Where is Kim? Kat, too?" Jason sidestepped the question.

Trini sighed. "When we told Kim we were going to make cookies, she got real quiet and pale. She asked if we'd help Tommy keep an eye on Drew while she went for a walk. As for Kat, she's been avoiding everyone all day. I think she and Kim had a fight last night after the rest of us went to bed."

"I'm not surprised." Tanya looked at her three friends. "Seriously, Kat really cares for Tommy. She's been mad at Kim since the day that letter arrived."

Trini touched Jason's arm. "Jase, I'm really worried about Kim. Will you find her and see if she's okay?"

"Sure." Jason promised as he grabbed a small handful of cookies. He wondered briefly if she was still upset about what happened with Trent the day before. But then he decided it probably had more to do with her argument with Kat.

He didn't have to go far to find her. As soon as he stepped out on the front porch he noticed she was sitting on the swing. She never heard him come out she was so lost in her thoughts. "Mind if I join you?"

Kim didn't look at him but gave him a slight nod. She looked across the yard. "Does the Jerk still live next door?"

Jason laughed. "Kim, Mr. Reynolds hit Dusty almost seven years ago. I've gotten over it and he was my dog. Why can't you forgive him?"

"Simple, he never asked anyone to."

Jason sat down and set the swing in slight motion. He held up a cookie. "Want one?"

She started to reach for it but stopped herself, her eyes full of tears. She turned away from him. "No thanks."

"Trini, Tanya and Aisha looked like they were having a lot of fun in there. Why aren't you in there with them?"

"Because they are having a lot of fun. I don't want to drag them down."

"Is it because of something Kat said last night?"

Kim glanced back at him in surprise. "How did... Trini heard us, huh? No, Jase, I'm a big girl. I can handle Kat. She has a right to be upset. It's the cookies."

Jason frowned, puzzled. "What's wrong with cookies? I seem to remember you being able to eat your weight in cookies at one point."

"Just hours before Drew was born and Andi died we were cooking cookies and having a grand old time. We were having so much fun, oblivious to what was about to happen. I can't bake cookies without remembering Andi and getting upset."

Jason frowned. He hated to see his friend upset. He put an arm around her shoulders. She rested her head on his shoulder. He wished he could say something to help her but what? He had never been through what she had went through.

"We were so naive, Jase. All those times we morphed into battle against Goldar, Scorpinia, or whichever one of Rita's monster of the week happened to appear. We never stopped to think one of us might not come back. Even when Tommy was losing his powers, we never thought about him dying as a result."

Jason said nothing. He seemed to realize she needed to talk, needed someone to listen to her. If that's all she wanted, it's what he would give her.

Suddenly, there I was in the worst situation of my life. There was no monster, just Donavon, but I was more scared of him than I have ever been of one of Rita or Zedd's goons. I would have given anything to have had my powers back for five minutes. I relive that night over

again every night in my dreams."

She fell silent and the two sat there for several minutes in companionable silence. Finally, Kim sighed. "Jase?"

"Yeah, Kim?"

"You're Tommy's best friend and he tells you just about everything, right?"

"Just about everything. Why?"

"Kat told me last night that she thought Tommy still loved me. She's wrong, isn't she?"

Jason shut his eyes. "Kim, don't bring me into this, please. I love you like a sister and Tommy is my best friend. I don't want to see either of you hurt."

"Too late for that. I've already hurt Tommy, two years ago when I sent that letter. I didn't have any choice but it hurts just the same. I was a basket case that first year. I was grieving for my friend, feeling inadequate as a mom, but the guilt was the worst. I felt guilty that I hadn't saved Andi, guilty that Trent was being so great to me when I had been positively hateful to him, and guilty over what I did to Tommy."

She pushed herself out of the swing. Bracing her hands on the porch railing she hopped up to sit where she could face Jason. Her wrist and ribs responded with only the briefest twinge of pain. She was glad she had been able to quit wearing the brace before she came here. She would have hated to have to explain to everyone about her "mugging."

"Jason, I love Trent. I don't feel the least bit guilty for that and I won't apologize for it. I never planned on falling for him and I can't even tell you when it actually happened, but suddenly while we were eating cake and celebrating Drew's first birthday, I realized I hadn't thought about Tommy not even once in a whole month and that I had sought out Trent's company as much as I could."

"Kim..."

"I don't love Tommy any more. At least not in a heart-stopping, breath-taking way. But I don't want to hurt him again. It wouldn't be fair to him. So what do I do?"

Jason stood in front of her and cupped her face in his hands. "Talk to him Kim. He's going to have to hear it from you. Tell him what you just told me. Ultimately he just wants you to be happy. But I won't lie to you Kim, it's going to hurt him. There's no avoiding that. But it's not your fault. You didn't ask for your feelings to change or for his not to."

Kim sniffed and nodded. "You're right. Once I put Drew down for a nap, I'll ask him to go to the park with me. Will you keep an eye on Drew while Tommy and I talk?"

"Sure, besides there's a whole house full of people who can help me."

"Man, it's a beautiful day. Coming here to the park was a good idea. I'm glad you suggested it." Tommy smiled at Kim.

Kim stuffed her hands in her shorts pockets. "We need to talk, Tommy. That's why I asked you to come here. I didn't want everyone coming in on us and interrupting."

Tommy turned toward her and touched her cheek. "You're right, we do need to talk. Kim, I'm sorry you had to go through all that by yourself. But you don't have to be alone anymore."

"Tommy, I'm not alone. I have Trent."

Tommy's soft brown eyes met her gaze and refused to let go. "And I'm glad he was there for you when I couldn't be. Kim, I won't lie to you, that letter hurt more than I can say. But now that I know why, it doesn't matter. I still love you: I don't think I ever stopped."

"Tommy, I..."

"No, let me finish, Kim. Losing you two years ago almost killed me. I can't lose you again. I know things will be awkward with Trent for awhile but I'm okay with that. He can still see Drew. Kim, I want you to marry me."

Kim turned away from him. "I can't, Tommy. I'm already engaged -- to Trent."

"Kim, it's okay. You don't have to marry him now. I can take care of both of you and Drew. I'll buy into Red Dragon Dojo with Rocky and Jason and you and I can get a house."

Kim shook her head. "I'm not marrying Trent because I have to marry him, Tommy. I'm marrying him because I want to be his wife. I love Trent."

"How could you love him? Kim, it's his fault that Donavon found you and almost killed you."

"And he has made up for that mistake every day since then. I can't hold it against him."

"How can you not? If he'd kept quiet, Andi wouldn't have died and you wouldn't have had to give up everything to raise her child. How can you forgive him for that?"

Kim growled in frustration. "Tommy, Jason is your best friend, right? Okay, so let's say Emily got pregnant..."

"I don't think Jason and Emily are sleeping together. Besides, what does that have to do..."

"Thomas Jared Oliver, for once let me finish without interrupting. Please work with me on this. So Emily is pregnant but she and Jason are fighting over what to do about it. She and I go off for the weekend to let things simmer down and only you know where we are but

you aren't supposed to tell anyone. Jason comes to you with a ring and tells you that he's been stupid for letting this go on as long as it has. He wants to propose to Emily before he loses his nerve. Do you tell him where to find her?"

"Of course. Why wouldn't I?"

Kim sighed. "Then how can I be mad at Trent for doing the same thing?"

Tommy took her arm. "Wait a minute, Kim, there's a difference. Jason's not a psychopath."

"Neither was Donavon as far as Trent knew. I struck out at Trent right after it happened out of grief and anger. A week later I regretted what I had said. Tommy, a lot has happened in two years. Things change, feelings change."

"Mine haven't."

"Mine have."

Tommy just stopped to and stared at her in disbelief. Kim took a deep breath, her eyes suspiciously dry. "I don't love you anymore, Tommy. At least not the way I did before I left for Florida. I'm sorry, Tommy. The last thing I want to do is hurt you again. If I gave you even the faintest idea that there could be something between us again, then I apologize a hundred times over. I'm happy with my life the way it is."

Tears filled Tommy's eyes. "What about what we had?"

"Tommy, what we had was wonderful. Past tense. But it's over and we can't get it back."

"Yes, we can, Beautiful. Just say the words and we can have it back."

Kim hung her head. Why was he making this so hard on her? She wanted to let him down easy but he wasn't listening to her. "Tommy, I don't want what we had back. I loved every minute of the time we had together, don't get me wrong. If things hadn't happened the way they did, you and I would probably be married right now. But Tommy, things did happen. It wasn't your fault and it was only partially mine but now things can never go back to where they were before Andi died and Drew became my responsibility. Trent was there for me at a time when I was too scared to admit that I needed anyone. He stood by me, knowing that I loved you and he never asked me to change the way I felt. But I did. I love Trent, Tommy. Trent, Drew, and I are a family. We belong together. I'm sorry, Tommy. I will always have a place in my heart for you but Trent is the man I am going to marry."

She turned her back to him, hoping that this time he had heard her. She hugged her arms to her chest. Why did life have to be so complicated? Would it have been better if she hadn't run into him at the racetrack? The lie would still be on her shoulders and she wouldn't have had this time with her old friends but at least she wouldn't be hurting Tommy all over again.

"I told Jason the other day that I the only way I could let you marry Trent is for you to convince me that it is what you truly want."

Kim turned to face him, relief clearly etched in her face. Tommy touched her cheek, his expression unreadable. "Kim, I'm not convinced."

Her face fell. "Tommy, what's it going to take to convince you that I love Trent?"

Cupping her head in his hands, Tommy stared into her eyes. "Kiss me, Kim."

"No, Tommy. I can't do that."

"That's because you know if you do I'll know you still love me." With those words, Tommy lowered his head until his lips touched Kim's.

Kim didn't react in any way to the kiss. Tommy finally pulled away. "I love you, Kim. Look me in the eye and tell me you don't love me."

Suddenly Kim whirled around and scanned the tree line. Tommy frowned. For a minute she reminded him of the times she had scanned for putties the same way. Only this time there was on fear in her eyes. "What is it Kim?"

"Trent is here."

"Where? I don't see him."

"He's gone now. But he was here and he saw you kiss me." She started to run toward the tree line but Tommy grabbed her arm.

"Kim, Trent's getting ready to race. He's not in Angel Grove."

"No, he was here; I felt him. What he must be thinking right now. I have to find him and explain."

"Kim..."

Suddenly Kim shoved him with the same intensity he had seen her use on putties. "Grow up, Tommy. There is a former Pink Ranger who does love you but I'm sorry, Tommy, it isn't me. Go to Kat, you both deserve to be happy. Now I have to go find the person who makes me happy."

Aisha hung up the phone as Jason came in holding Drew. She smiled at the toddler. "Hey, look who woke up. That was your daddy on the phone. He's in town and wants to see you."

Jason frowned. "Trent is in Angel Grove?"

"Yep, he said he missed Kim and couldn't stay away. I told him Kim wasn't here but he said that was okay. He'd paged her and asked her to meet him at the lake. He asked me to bring Drew to meet them."

"I'll take him."

"You sure? I don't mind."

"Aisha, I've met Trent, you haven't. Kim would have a duck fit if you trusted someone at their word that he was Drew's father."

Aisha laughed. "Good point. I'm glad you thought of that."

Jason bounced Drew a little. "Come on Drew. Let's go see your Daddy."

"Trent?" Kim frowned as she scanned the lake for her fiancÃ©. Not seeing him she glanced down at her pager to reread the message she leaving Tommy.

Meet me at the lake - T

Well, here she was; where was he? She had to explain to him what he had seen. After everything she had put him through while she was still pining for Tommy, she knew he had to be worried about what it meant.

A masculine arm grabbed her around the waist. "Hello again, Kim."

Kim's heart skipped a beat and her blood ran cold. The voice that had haunted her dreams for two years now was breathing in her ear.

"Donavon. How?"

He laughed. "Did you really think you could get away from me so easily? Our little meeting in Waco was just a teaser. Oh, don't get me wrong, if that couple hadn't interrupted me in that parking garage, I would have killed you. Lucky for both of us that they came by. If I had killed you then I would have never found out about Drew - my son."

He knew about Drew. Could things get any worse? She struggled to get free. She had to get away from him; had to get back to Jason's and get Drew. Once they were safely out of Angel Grove, she would call Trent and they would decide on a place to meet.

"Quit squirming, Kim. I could kill you now but I need your help with Drew."

"You'll never get your hands on my son. My friends won't let you."

Donavon Black laughed. "You give them too much credit. Drew will be here any minute now. Your friend, Aisha is bringing him. All I had to tell her was that I was Trent. Now I need you out of site until I have the baby. Say goodnight, Kim."

Even as she struggled, Kim felt the prick of a needle in her arm. Her limbs grew heavy as he dragged her toward the parking lot. She felt him slip her pager off her waistband. With her drugged body already betraying her, her only defense was her voice. "Don't do this,

Donavon. Please, do what you want to me but leave my baby alone."

Donavon tossed her into the trunk of his car. The last of consciousness was slowly ebbing away but she heard his final words before darkness of the drug induced sleep and the closing of the trunk robbed her of remaining light. "He's my son, Kim and now he'll know it."

"Fishie, Ace?" Drew pointed to the water. He strained in Jason's arms, obviously wanting down so he could run toward the water.

"There are a few fishies in there I guess, but you aren't going near them. You mommy would kill me if I let you anywhere near the water."

"Mama." Drew nodded as if he understood what Jason was saying.

"Hey, Drew." A man who was not Trent stepped out from behind a tree. He smiled at Jason. "Hi, you can't be the one I talked to on the phone; Aisha, I think her name was. I'm Trent Connerey, Kim's fiancÃ©. I'll go ahead and take Drew; Kim will be here in just a minute."

Jason frowned. Obviously, this guy didn't know he knew Trent. Jason held Drew a little tighter. "Can I see some ID? Kim would kill me if I just handed her son over to someone without making sure of who you are."

The smile faded from the man's face. "Can you believe I left my wallet in the car? Don't worry about it, um, which one of Kim's friends are you? Tommy, Billy, Jason?"

"Jason." Obviously whomever this guy was, he knew a lot about Kim.

"Jason, right, I should have figured that. Anyway, as I was saying, I'm sure Kim will be okay with this. Come here, Drew, come see Daddy."

Drew rested his head on Jason's shoulder. "No Dada."

Jason could see a darkness growing in the man's eyes and took a step backward. He knew he should get Drew out of there but he was afraid that if Kim did show up she would be in danger. He couldn't leave her to face it alone. "Maybe I should just wait until Kim shows up. I'd feel better that way."

"Give me my son!"

Suddenly it hit Jason who this must be. Had Donavon found out about Drew and traced Kim to here? What Jason wouldn't have given for his communicator right then. He took another step backward.

"Where are you going, Jason?"

"You aren't Trent. I've met Kim's fiancÃ©. I'm not letting you get

your hands on her son"

"He's my son, Jason. Kim stole him from me."

So that confirmed it; the man standing in front of him was Donavon Black. Jason's eyes darkened. If he didn't have Drew to worry about, he would make this sorry scum pay for what he had done to Kim. But he did have Drew to think about.

"No, you forfeited that right when you killed his mom. I'm not letting you near Drew."

Jason continued to walk backwards. There was no way he was turning his back on this psychopath. Donavon's next words stopped him in his tracks. "Then I guess I have to go back to where I have Kim stashed and kill her. She's worth nothing to me alive if I don't have Drew. Walk away if you want, Jason, but you'll never see your friend again if you do."

"How can I be sure you have Kim?"

Donavon held up Kim's page. "Would I have this if I didn't have her?"

"All I see is a pager. It could be anyone's."

Donavon tossed the pager to Jason. With one hand Jason caught it and thumbed through the saved messages. He hung his head when he saw the one from Trent that he had saved for Kim in the Jeep yesterday. He pocketed the pager without a word.

Jason was torn. He knew he should get Drew away. He knew that would be what Kim would want him to do but he couldn't just walk away if Kim was in danger. He had already faced this dilemma once, when he had to abandon his mission to keep the green candle from burning away all of Tommy's power to help the rest of the team. That time, it had cost his friend his powers, what would be the cost this time?

"Tough choice, isn't it? Who do you save, Drew or Kim? I won't hurt Drew. He's my son. But I won't hesitate to kill Kim. You know that. Can you really do that to her?"

Jason hung his head. If he left, Donavon would kill Kim and probably come after Drew again. If he went with Donavon willingly he might have a chance later to get both Kim and Drew to safety. "Okay, take us to Kim."

Donavon smiled. "I knew you would see things my way. Walk toward the parking lot. Don't get any ideas or sweet Kimberly will pay for your stupidity."

Donavon opened the back door of his car. Jason looked around. "Where's Kim?"

"Hidden. I'm not stupid, Jason. You look pretty strong. If you knew where Kim was, you would probably try to be a hero. Put Drew in the back seat and get down on your knees with your hands behind your head."

Reluctantly Jason obeyed. He silently asked Kim to forgive him.

Donavon tied Jason's hands tightly behind his back. It chafed Jason not to be able to fight back. Donavon pushed Jason into the back seat and slammed the door. Drew was crying now and climbed up into Jason's lap. Jason wished his hands were free so he could comfort the toddler.

"Ace? Want Mama."

Donavon jumped into the front seat and started the car. "Sorry I don't have a car seat yet. I'll get one."

"Mama." The two year old cried again.

"She's not your mama but you'll see her again. For a little while at least; then it will be just you and me."

'Not if I can help it.' Jason promised silently. 'It will be a cold day in Hell before I let you get away with this.'

**

Chapter Ten

**

Tommy Oliver eased down on the front steps of Jason's house. He wasn't ready to go inside; wasn't ready to face anyone. He wondered if Kim was back or if she was still at the park pretending to look for Trent. He didn't believe she had seen Trent at all. He thought she was using her fiancÃ© as an excuse to avoid him. He sensed nothing in her kiss that convinced him that it was over between them. He didn't know why she couldn't admit it.

The front door opened and someone sat beside him. Tommy didn't look to see who it was. A slender hand touched his shoulder. "Tommy, what's wrong?"

"Nothing Kat."

"Don't give me that, Tommy. We are too good of friends for that. I know you too well. What has Kim done now?"

"I love her, Kat. I know I probably shouldn't be telling you this but it's the truth."

"Tommy, Kim is engaged to the father of her child. You're setting yourself up to be hurt. Wasn't Kim hurting you once enough to last you a lifetime?"

Tommy looked at his former girlfriend. "Kim's not going to hurt me this time. She's confused right now but she'll see. We belong together. So, is Kim back yet?"

The beautiful blonde frowned. "No, Tommy. Her fiancÃ© called about a half hour ago. He wanted to surprise Kim and Drew at the lake. Jason's gone to take Drew now."

Tommy nodded. So Trent had been at the park. He sighed. He wondered what they were talking about right then. He hoped that Trent seeing them together would make it easier for Kim to admit her true

feelings.

"Tommy, I don't understand. Kim went and slept with another guy and got pregnant by him. She betrayed you in the most hideous way. How can you still love her?"

Tommy shook his head. "It's nothing I can explain, Kat. I just do."

Kat frowned when she saw a stranger walk up Jason's driveway. He was tall and good looking but the expression in his eyes was haunted. "Who's that?"

Tommy looked up. His eyes widened in surprise. "Trent."

Trent barely could look at his friend. "Tommy."

Kat studied the man Kim was engaged to. He noticed her for the first time. He smiled and held out his hand. "Hi, I'm Trent Connerey. You must be Katherine Hilliard. Kimber's told me all about you. It's nice to finally meet you. Are Kim and Drew inside?"

Tommy looked at him sharply and then looked to Kat. "I thought you said Jason was taking Drew to meet Kim and Trent."

"What?" Trent stared at her in alarm.

Kat nodded. "Aisha talked to you on the phone. She was going to take him but Jason offered to go instead."

Trent paled. "I didn't call. Where were they supposed to meet me at? I have to get to them."

"The lake. Why would someone pretend to be you?"

Trent's face was frantic with worry. He didn't want to spend this time explaining. Kim was in horrible danger and so was Drew.

"Donavon, it has to be."

Tommy shook his head. "I didn't think he even knew about Drew, let alone where to find Kim."

"He found her in Waco. Tommy, Kim wasn't mugged. Donavon beat her to a pulp in the parking garage of our apartment building. He must have followed her from there. And now he knows about Drew. Come on, maybe we can get there in time."

As the two boys took off down the driveway, Kat called after them. "Who's Donavon?"

Trent sparred only enough time to fling two words back to Kat before he disappeared. "Drew's father."

Jason grunted as Donavon tried him tightly to a chair. He could already feel the circulation being cut off to his hands. Drew was on the floor crying. And Donavon had yet to produce Kim.

"Okay, you sicko." Jason growled through clenched teeth. "Where's Kim?"

Donavon laughed. "Relax, tough guy. I'm going to get her now."

As soon as he left the boat shack he had brought them to, Jason strained against his bonds but it was no use. Donavon had tied them too tight. If only Drew was old enough to untie him. His heart went out to the small toddler whose face was splotchy red from crying.

"It's okay, Drew. I'm going to get us out of here."

"Don't lie to him." Donavon re-entered, an unconscious Kim slung over his shoulder. He dumped her unceremoniously to the floor in a heap.

Jason doubled his efforts to get free and he looked Kim over for any signs of injury. He could see none. "What have you done to her? So help me, if you've...."

"She's merely asleep thanks to a friend who works for a vet. He gave me a syringe of sedative they use to knock out large animals. She'll be out of it for a while yet. Now, I've got to get some supplies. We'll be hiding here until Drew trusts me enough that I don't need either of you. Don't get any ideas; I'll be back in ten minutes."

As soon as Donavon left the room, Drew toddled over to his mom's side. "Mama!" He patted her face expectantly and insistently. He couldn't understand why she wouldn't answer him.

Then to Jason's amazement, she moaned. Encouraged, Drew continued his efforts and Jason joined him. "Come on Kim, wake up. We need you. Wake up!"

Slowly her eyes opened but wouldn't focus on anything. She mumbled almost incoherently. "Trent? I'm sorry. Don't love Tommy, love you."

"Kim, it's Jason. Come on, wake up all the way. Please, we don't have much time."

"Jase? Oh, no, Donavon." She struggled to sit up and pull Drew into her lap. Though she was awake, it was obvious that the drug still had her body paralyzed and she was unable to do what she wanted. She would be no help in freeing them. It was all she could do to put her arms comfortingly around Drew as he laid his head on her shoulder.

That's how Donavon found her and Drew when he returned minutes later. He sat a box on the counter and smiled. "Good, you are awake. Now you can begin to pay."

"And Kim and I have been raising Drew every since then. We didn't think Donavon could ever find us in Waco but apparently he did two weeks before Kim joined me at the track. He's got her and this time he's got Drew and Jason too."

The others sat around the living room stunned. Trini found her voice first. "Why didn't Kim tell us?"

Trent paced back and forth. "Kim's sole consideration these last two years has been Drew. I've never seen anyone sacrifice so much and still remain so sweet and generous."

"That's our Kim all right. She'd do anything for family." Billy agreed. Kat looked stricken and turned away from the others.

Trent punched the sofa as he passed it. "We can't just sit around here doing nothing. Donavon will kill Kim. Can't you contact Zordon and see if he can track her?"

Everyone got deathly still. When nobody said anything Trent rolled his eyes. "Come on guys. We don't have time for all that secret hero stuff. Yes, I know that you are Power Rangers. Kim told me one night when Drew was a few months old. She had been up for two days straight with Drew. He had an ear infection and bronchitis. Kim was in the midst of a highly emotional wig out and let the information slip. But that's not important now. Can Zordon help us?"

"We aren't Rangers anymore." Rocky explained. "And Zordon has left Earth. Trust us, we'd do it if we could."

Adam grabbed the phone. "Donavon won't be thinking we would know who he was to trace him so he probably left a trail. I know who can help us."

"Who?" Aisha asked as he started to dial.

"Bulk and Skull."

Donavon knelt in front of Kim, a wicked gleam in his eye. "You really thought you were something, didn't you? Did you really think you could get away with stealing my child and claiming him as your own? Answer me, Kimberly."

Kim's eyes were red and her body still refused to obey her brain. All she had managed was wrapping her arms around Drew. "I didn't steal him. Andi told me to raise him."

"That stupid little wench. I enjoyed killing her. Just like I'm going to enjoy killing you."

"Leave her alone." Jason ordered as he pulled against his bonds.

"SHUT UP!" Twisting away from Kim, Donavon slammed his fist into Jason's stomach.

Jason forced himself not to react. "Is that your best shot?"

"Do you really want me to show you my best shot?" Donavon spoke in a low menacing voice.

"If you think you are bad enough." Jason knew it was crazy to egg him

on but at least Donavon was ignoring Kim. Maybe it would give her enough time to recover. Suddenly the barrel of a revolver was thrust into Jason's face.

"Oh, I'm bad enough."

"Donavon, stop it." Kim shouted at him. "If you care about Drew at all, stop it."

For several long minutes, Donavon stood there with his gun trained on Jason. Jason barely dared to breath. Kim forced her heavy arm to shield Drew's face from the scene that faced them but she couldn't take her eyes off Jason. She couldn't lose another friend. Finally Donavon put the revolver in his waistband and turned to Kim.

"Always trying to save your friends, huh, Kim? You didn't save Andi. You left her behind. You should have been there the first time I plunged the knife into her stomach. She didn't scream like you did. That made me mad so I pulled the knife out and stabbed her again and again but she never screamed."

Kim's eyes burned with the need to cry but the tears refused to form. Even her tear ducts seemed to be paralyzed. "That's because she didn't care what you did to her. Her baby was safe; that's all that mattered to her. She knew you weren't going to let her live and there was no way she'd give you the satisfaction of hearing her scream."

Donavon backhanded her across the cheek. Drew cried harder and clutched at Kimberly tighter. Her cheek stung but she refused to show any reaction. Her eyes narrowed. "Keep that up and you'll never get Drew to trust you."

"I'll make him trust me." Donavon wrenched the two year old from Kim's arms. Both mother and son screamed for each other. Kim tried to reach out for him but her drugged body betrayed her and she landed on her face.

Donavon laughed at her. "What's wrong, Kim? Too weak to protect your son? Pathetic. Good thing I'm taking him. No telling what would happen to him if he stayed with you."

Gathering up every ounce of strength she could muster from her drug laden limbs, Kimberly drew herself up to her knees and lunged forward. All Kim managed to do was slap at his waist but it was enough to dislodge the pistol. It clattered to the ground but fortunately didn't go off. Before Donavon could do anything; Kim snatched up the weapon and trained it on him.

"Put Drew down and untie Jason. Do it, Donavon."

"Or what? You won't shoot me, Kim; you might hit Drew. Not that you could hit the broadside of the barn."

Kim's hand shook as she thumbed back the hammer. Jason held his breath. He knew what a crack shot she was. He'd seen her spend hours at a target range practicing with a hand gun and a bow and arrow. Jason waited for her to pull the trigger.

Kim slowly started to lower the gun. She could easily put a bullet

between his eyes without batting an eye. But Donavon was holding her son and she didn't want Drew to see her shoot someone.

With a steely laugh, Donavon wrenched the gun from her slender hand. His booted foot flashed out catching Kim in the stomach. Kim reeled backward with a groan. "Nice try, Kim.."

Donavon's head jerked around as he heard a vehicle coming down the gravel drive. He swore. Clutching Drew close to him, he moved to look out the window. A motorcycle with a side car was coming up the road. It stopped next to the pier. The driver, a tall skinny guy with a shock of black hair, removed his helmet. The passenger, a hefty guy with a crew cut, stepped out of the sidecar. Both boys totally ignored the boathouse as they pulled a picnic basket and a fishing pole from the sidecar.

"Just a couple of punks out for some fishing. Nobody make a sound and I won't kill them."

"Dada." Drew called out tearfully.

Donavon held the little boy tighter. "That's my boy. See Kim, he already knows who I am."

Kim hung her head. She couldn't believe Drew would ever call Donavon "daddy." Then she saw Jason motion to the window. Glancing back, she caught a glimpse of Trent peeking in. She almost cried out in relief. This nightmare would soon be over but she had to get Drew out of Donavon's arms. Then she spied his diaper bag on the floor behind Jason's chair.

"Donavon, can I change Drew's diaper? If he gets too wet, he gets a really bad diaper rash."

Donavon thought about it for a second and then set Drew on his feet. The two year old ran for Kim and threw his arms around her. She kissed his tear stained face. "I love you slugger. Go get a diap for Mama."

For a second she didn't think he would go but obviously his diaper was really wet because he took off toward the diaper bag. Kim didn't take her eyes off Drew. Suddenly both the front and back doors slammed opened. Rocky, Zack, and Adam came in the front door while Tommy, Billy and Trent burst in from the back door.

Donavon's face grew red in anger. Pulling out his gun, he leveled it on Kim. She saw the look in his eyes and knew he was going to kill her. She refused to close her eyes as he cocked the gun and slowly pulled the trigger. She braced herself for the bullet to rip into her body.

Though the shot was fired, the bullet never hit her. Instead, Trent lunged forward in front of her at the last second. The bullet hit him square in the chest and he fell at Kim's feet. He looked up as consciousness rapidly left him. "I love you, Kim" was all he could say before he passed out.

**

Chapter Eleven

** -

Author's note: The song used in this chapter and the next is "I Will Be Here" by Steven Curtis Chapman and is used without permission (but it fits Kim and Trent so well.)

—

Everything became still and silent in that split second after the gun went off and Trent collapsed. But then activity resumed. Aisha grabbed up a screaming Drew and ran out of the shack taking the toddler to safety. Adam and Tommy double-teamed Donavon, knocking him to the ground. Kat kicked the gun away, sending it skittering to the corner. Trini and Zack untied Jason. Rocky knelt beside Trent as two familiar figures entered the shack.

Kim looked stunned to see Bulk and Skull join the others as Billy knelt in front of her. Skull joined him as Bulk went to help Rocky. "Kim, are you okay?"

"Trent? How's Trent?" Kim ignored Skull's question as she tried to get to her fiancÃ©'s side. Her body still refused to cooperate and she sank back into Billy's arms, her eyes frantically seeking out word on Trent's condition.

Skull touched her arm. "Don't worry, Kim. Bulk and I called for back-up and an ambulance before coming in here. Paramedics should be here shortly. Are you hurt anywhere?"

Tommy looked over at his former girlfriend; he expected to either see her crying or in a faint. Those were the two reactions he was used to seeing with Kim. Instead she was simply sitting there shaking in Billy's arms staring at Trent's fallen body. A light had gone out of her eyes; a light he had never noticed was there until it was missing. In that instant Tommy was convinced; Kim truly loved Trent

Tommy hung his head. Kat touched his arm briefly as she handed Adam the rope that Donavon had used to tie up Jason. Once Donavon was securely tied, Tommy left him to Adam and Kat and joined Billy and Skull with Kim. "How is she, Bro?"

Billy was worried about her. Kim hadn't said much and her body felt heavy in his arms. He looked at Skull and raised his eyebrow. The former bully took a second more to check out Kim and then looked back at Tommy.

"I think she's in shock. I'm going to go help Bulk and Rocky with Trent. You two stay with her. See if you can get her to respond."

Sirens grew louder as an ambulance and police car sped down the gravel drive. Jason joined Bill and Tommy. He took a moment to explain about the sedative Kim had been given. Billy and Tommy alternately tried asking her questions but Kim ignored all of them. Kim was aware of the presence of only one and he was lying prone on the floor, blood gushing from the chest wound. She heard nothing but the repeating sound of gunfire as her mind replayed Donavon shooting Trent.

Three paramedics and two police officers entered the already crowded boat shack. As Junior Patrol officers, Bulk and Skull handled explaining the situation. One officer led Donavon out of the shack while the other tried to clear the room of everyone but the injured. Nobody wanted to leave Kim behind but finally she was alone with just the paramedics, Jason, and Trent.

"He's going to be okay, isn't he? He's got to be. I can't survive without him."

Jason sank to the floor beside her and put an arm around her. He wasn't really hurt, just bruised, but if allowing the medics to look him over meant he could stay with Kim then it was worth it. "They're doing everything they can for him, Kim."

Leaving the other two medics to work on Trent, the third knelt beside Kim and Jason. Sensing Kim was the worse off of the two, the medic concentrated on her. "What about you? Where are you hurt?"

"I don't matter. Just help Trent."

"I can't find a pulse; we're losing him. Grab the AED."

"NO!" Kim tried to lunge forward but Jason kept tight hold of her. The paramedic stepped in front of her, blocking her view. He hoped that would help calm her down but it was obvious the girl was inconsolable.

"The guy who kidnapped us gave her a pretty powerful animal sedative a couple of hours ago. She's been awake for a little over an hour but she's still sort of out of it." Jason explained.

The medic stopped in mid-search through his drug bag. He'd been about to sedate her but couldn't given the fact that she had already been drugged. Since that was out of the question, he would have to go to plan B, physically removing her from the building. "Okay, can you help me take her out to the ambulance?"

Jason nodded. Between them both, they lifted Kim to her feet and practically dragged her to the door. Outside on the porch, the former Rangers had gathered on one side of the porch while the officers including Bulk and Skull were exchanging Donavon's ropes for handcuffs.

When Kim saw Donavon, she pulled away from Jason and the paramedic. Using all of her energy, she tried to attack the man who had tormented her life. Skull caught her before she could reach him or fall. She strained in Skull's arms. "You, I hate you! You murdered my best friend and almost killed Drew and me. You attack me at my home and now this. You kidnapped Drew, Jason and me. You may have killed the most important person in my life outside of my son. I hope you rot in Hell."

Donavon struggled against the officer's hold. "He's my son. You kidnapped him from me. My father will take care of this. I will have my son. I promise you that."

Skull looked back at the officers. "Can you go ahead and get that piece of trash out of here? Bulk and I will make sure you get

everyone's statements."

The officers agreed and led Donavon away. The others were about to gather around their injured friend when the two medics shot out of the shack with Trent on a stretcher. Though they were no longer doing CPR, it was clear Trent was still in bad shape. Skull lifted an almost hysterical Kim into his arms and carried her to the ambulance.

Jason took only enough time to make sure the others were going to follow them to the hospital before allowing the medic to lead him to the front of the ambulance. The back doors closed and the ambulance shot off down the road.

The eleven somber teens watched as the ambulance disappeared down the road. Rocky took Drew from Aisha and absently patted the toddler on the back, hoping to comfort him. Aisha looked at her friends, concern evident in her eyes. "Trent's going to be all right, isn't he?"

Rocky and Bulk, who had spent the most time working on him, looked at each other. Rocky couldn't face his teammates. "I don't know. He was losing so much blood."

"He'll be okay." The others looked at Tommy, surprised by his quiet assurance. "He has to be. Because if he's not, I don't know how Kim will make it."

"Trent?" Kim opened her eyes and sat up. Her body still felt incredibly heavy but at least it was obeying her brain's commands. She looked around. It was obvious she was in a hospital room even though it was dark. Jason was stretched out on the small couch sound asleep and Billy was in the chair beside her bed also asleep. But hearing her call out, Billy opened his eyes and smiled at her.

"Welcome back. We were starting to get worried."

"Where's Drew? Why am I here in this hospital bed?" She looked around worriedly. Billy gave her arm a reassuring squeeze.

"Relax, Drew is back at Jason's asleep. The others are taking really good care of him. You passed out in the ambulance. As far as the doctor can figure, that sedative Donavon gave you was strong enough to knock out an elephant. You've been asleep for almost ten hours."

The events of the afternoon rushed back to her then and she remembered Trent being shot. She clutched Billy's arm. "How's Trent?"

Billy hesitated. Kim caught the look on his face and assumed the worst. A sob rose up from the depths of her soul and she doubled over on the bed as it burst forth. Jason woke with a start as Billy left the chair to sit beside her on the bed. "Kim, Trent's alive. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have hesitated and scared you like that."

It took a moment for his words to register but when they did, she

looked up at him. "Promise?"

Jason sat on the other side of her. "Kim, I won't lie to you, he's in bad shape. The bullet grazed his heart and it did a lot of damage. He's one floor up in ICU."

"I have to see him."

"Kim, he's in ICU, they won't let you in. I talked to the doctor earlier; they'll let us know in here if there are any changes. Now come on, lie back down and go back to sleep."

Kim stubbornly shook her head. "Not until I see Trent. I don't care what they say; I want to see Trent now. You can help me or not but either way, you had better hand me my robe or else you will be seeing whatever this gown doesn't cover."

Billy sighed and picked up the phone. He punched in four numbers and waited for someone to answer. "Hi, this is Billy Cranston again. Kim Hart just woke up and is pretty anxious to see her fiancÃ©. She's not going to relax until she does. Is there anyway she could spend a few minutes with him?" He listened for a minute and nodded even though the person he was talking to couldn't see him. "Thanks."

Hanging up the phone, he leveled Kim in his gaze. "Okay, the night nurse said you can see him for ten minutes."

Jason touched her shoulder. "If you are going to do this, let us prepare you. He's not on life support but he does have a tube down his throat and he's hooked to a lot of monitors. Are you sure you want to see him like that?"

"No but I want to see him, so I have no choice."

Jason handed her a robe. "Okay, then, let's go."

Kim was stronger now that the sedative was mostly out of her system but she still leaned heavily on her two friends as they walked down to the corridor to the elevator. Billy noticed that she was trembling but had to wonder if it was from the sedative or from fear of what she was going to find in Trent's room. The nurse met them at the entrance to the unit. She smiled at Kim.

"Honey, you look like you should still be in bed yourself, but I guess I would be the same way if it were my fiancÃ© in there. Before you go in, though, why don't we all have a seat in the conference room so I can update you on his condition."

Kim nodded and squeezed Billy's hand tightly. She allowed her two oldest friends to lead her into a small room. Once they were all seated the nurse began. "Okay, the bullet barely missed the left ventricle of his heart but it did sever a coronary artery. Those arteries are what feed the heart. The doctor was able to stop the bleeding and make repairs by performing a single heart bypass. Trent lost quite a bit of bloodâ€|"

"We have the same blood type; I can donate." Kim offered.

"We'll see. We are low on his blood type and have been using O negative instead. However, with you being admitted to the hospital,

I'll have to check with your doctor and see if we can take and use your blood. If you can donate, I'll arrange things. Trent is unconscious. The sooner he wakes up the better we think his chances of making a full recovery. The next seventy-two hours are critical."

"Can I see him now?"

"Sure, your friends can wait in here for you."

The nurse led her into the cubicle where Trent lay completely flat in the hospital bed. Kim eased into a chair next to the bed and took his hand in her own. The nurse touched Kim's shoulder. "I'll be at the desk if you need me. Talk to him. He probably can hear you even if he can't respond."

Kim waited until she was alone with the man that she loved. "Oh Trent, you have to be okay. Why did you have to jump in front of me? I would much rather be the one lying there. I am so sorry you saw Tommy kiss me. It didn't mean anything. You are the one I love now and for always. I told him that."

As she sat there holding his hand and listening to the beeps of the various monitors, she spoke to him softly. She reminded him of all the happiest times they had already shared. Her voice caught as she got to the night he proposed. What she had told the girls had only been the start of the perfect evening. The memory swept her back to that cold gazebo.

—
** Trent took her in his arms and kissed her once again. "I don't think I could be any happier than I am right now."

—
_ "Me either. This is for real, isn't it? I'm not going to wake up and find it was a dream?"_

—
"It's real, Angel. I've been trying to figure out how to make this night as romantic as possible and until yesterday afternoon, I still didn't know what I was going to do after you said yes. All those romantic movies you love so much always have the guy singing to the girl or reading a beautiful love poem. Well I can't carry a tune in a bucket and none of the poems I looked at said exactly what I wanted to say to you. I was about to give up hope with coming up with just the right thing when I heard this song on the radio yesterday. I had to pull off the road and listen because this song was straight out of my thoughts for you. It was like someone had listened to my most private thoughts and set them to music. I drove all over town until I found a copy of the song. I want to play it for you. I know it's not the same as singing to you myself but I think you would prefer it this way. You can always close your eyes and pretend it's me singing."

Trent led her to the bench and sat down with her in his lap. He twisted long enough to change the tapes in the player and hit play. Kim obediently closed her eyes. Soon, the soft music began and a

strong masculine voice began to sing.

—

Tomorrow morning if you wake up and the sun does not appear, I, I will be here.

If in the dark we lose sight of love, hold my hand and have no fear

Cause I, I will be here. I will be here when you feel like being quiet.

When you need to speak your mind, I will listen.

And I will be here when the laughter turns to crying;

Through the winning, losing and trying; we'll be together, cause I will be here.

Tomorrow morning if you wake up and the future isn't clear, I, I will be here.

As sure as seasons are made for change, our lifetimes are made for years

So I, I will be here. I will be here and you can cry on my shoulder.

When the mirror tells us we're older, I will hold you.

And I will be here to watch you grow in beauty

And tell you all the things you are to me. I will be here.

I will be true to the promise I have made to you and to the one

Who gave you to me. I, I will be here.

And just as sure as seasons are made for change, our lifetimes are made for years

So I, I will be here. We'll be together. I will be here._**_

— —

Kim clutched Trent's hand tightly. "Trent, I'm holding your hand and the laughter is definitely crying right now. There has never been a time when the future is more unclear than it is now. You promised you would be here. I can't let you go back on our word. I just can't. You have to live, if for no other reason than because of Drew. I don't know what would happen to him if you died because I don't know that I can go on living without you in my life."

"You can and you will." Billy knelt beside her chair. Kim leaned against him and let him comfort her. "Kim, I've only known you as a mother for a couple of days but you've already shown me that you do what ever Drew needs you to do. If Trent doesn't make it, you'll find the strength to go on because Drew will need you."

Kim's voice shook as she replied. "Even if I don't want to?"

"Even then. But I bet you are worrying for nothing; Trent doesn't strike me as the type of person who would give up on your love. If there is anyway around it, he'll live just to see your smiling face."

Kim smiled wanly and gave Trent's slack hand another squeeze. "Wake up, Trent. We've got a wedding to plan. I'm going to be right here until you wake up."

"I'm sorry, Kim, but the nurse sent me in here to tell you your time is up. She said you'll have to leave and come back at the regular visiting time."

Kim sniffled. "When is that?"

"Ten a.m. It's a little after four now. Why don't we go back to your room? You need the rest."

Kim didn't want to leave but knew she had no choice. She leaned over Trent wanting to kiss him but the tube in his mouth made that impossible. So instead, she nuzzled his neck and kissed his cheek at the base of his jaw. "Stay strong, Trent. I love you."

As Billy helped her from the cubicle, the nurse smiled at her. "Go and get some rest, Miss Hart. I'll keep an eye on him."

"What about giving him my blood?"

"Your doctor should be making rounds in a couple of hours. I'll ask him as soon as he comes in and I'll let you know."

"Thanks." Kim answered softly. Despite the fact that she had slept for so long she was already tired again. She leaned heavily on her friends as they helped her back to her room.

By the time she climbed back in bed she was half-asleep and sobbing quietly. She clutched her pillow close as she cried. Jason and Billy looked at each other, wondering what they could do for her. Billy caressed her hair.

"What is it, Kim?"

"What if Trent just gives up?"

"Why would he do that?" Billy probed gently.

"He saw Tommy kiss me. It meant nothing but I never got a chance to explain what happened. What if he thinks I still have feelings for Tommy? He probably hates me."

"Trent doesn't hate you, Kim; he loves you. You should have seen him when he realized Donavon had you. There is no doubt how he feels about you." Billy tried to console her but she would have none of it. Jason reached into his pocket and his hand closed around Kim's pager. He pulled it out and thumbed through the saved messages.

He sat beside Kim on the bed and put the pager in her hands. Then he eased her backward until her back rested against the bed. "Trent does

love you. If you doubt that at all, look at that message until you fall asleep."

Kim glanced down at the message he had selected and smiled through her tears.

I love you too, Angel. I'm sorry I let you go for even a second without saying it. Call me soon; I miss you, Kimber.

Jason settled back on the couch and Billy returned to his chair. Kim continued to stare at the message even though her vision was blurred with tears. The words to their song floated through her weary mind. If in the dark we lose sight of love, hold my hand and have no fear, cause I, I will be here.

--

Kim sniffled. She couldn't hold Trent's hand but she hung onto his message just as tightly as she would have his hand. After awhile sleep claimed her once more the pager still clutched firmly in her grip.

**

Chapter Twelve

**

"Mama."

Rocky held the two-year-old a little tighter as Drew tried to pull away from him. As soon as he, Trini, and Tommy entered the hospital room, they had noticed that Kim was sleeping fitfully in the bed. Billy looked up and smiled at them.

"Hey, guys. Come on in."

Tommy nodded toward Kim. "How is she?"

Billy shrugged. "Emotionally she won't be better until she knows Trent is going to recover but physically she's doing okay. She regained consciousness around four a.m. and insisted on seeing Trent. It took us awhile but we finally got her to go back to sleep. About an hour ago, her doctor came by; he was going to release her but she really wanted to donate blood for Trent. The doctor really didn't want to let her because she was already so weak but you know Kim. She's been out every since they took blood."

"Mama." Drew called out again.

Rocky looked at him. "Mama's asleep. We don't want to wake her."

Drew instantly teared up and his lowered lip began to quiver. "Mama, Wocket, want Mama."

Rocky sighed. "He's been like this all night. I doubt he's ever been away from Kim for this long before. I put him in bed with me since he's spent more time around me than anyone else has at the house but he still tossed and turned and cried all night."

Kim didn't wake up as Drew began to loudly cry but her sleep did become more restless than it had been. The door opened behind the newcomers and Jason slipped in carrying two Styrofoam plates. He greeted his friends and handed Billy the plates.

"Come here, Drew. What's with the tears? I bet you've missed your mama, haven't you?" Jason took Drew from Rocky and carried him over to the bed. The others started to protest but stopped once Jason settled Drew in Kim's arms.

Drew quit crying and rested his head on Kim's chest. At the same time, Kim's arms closed protectively over his body and she settled into a more peaceful sleep. In no time at all both mother and son were sound asleep. Jason smiled. "I guess they missed each other."

Trini smiled. "I guess so. What's the latest on Trent?"

Billy sighed. "No better, no worse. His night nurse came by earlier to check on Kim. She said his vital signs are stable and they are going to try taking the tube out of his mouth. They really won't know anything until he wakes up. What's the latest on Donavon?"

Rocky smiled. "He's being held without bond. Bulk and Skull said he screamed all night about his father being a Florida judge. They all took turns reminding him that this was California, not Florida. After awhile they got tired of listening and threatened to gag him if he didn't shut up. Jason, they did say they need you to come in to make your statement as soon as you can."

"I guess I can go now if you guys are going to be here for Kim."

Trini smiled. "Why don't both you and Billy leave for awhile. I bet you two didn't get much sleep either. We'll be here if Kim needs us."

Billy hated to leave but he had to agree with Trini. He was worn out from trying to sleep in that chair all night. "Sounds great. Just please make sure that Kim is awake an hour and a half so she can make the ten o'clock visitation. If she sleeps through that and has to wait until two, she is not going to be happy."

Tommy nodded. "We'll make sure she's there."

Rocky eyed the Styrofoam containers Jason had brought in. "Is that breakfast?"

Jason nodded. "The cafeteria is in the basement. They close in thirty minutes if you want something."

Trini put a hand on Rocky's shoulder. "Come on, Rocky, I'll go down with you. Tommy, do you want anything?"

Tommy shook his head. He was watching Kim as she slept. Part of him wanted to be hurt that she didn't love him anymore but he couldn't be. Right now he was just scared. Scared that Kim would hate him for being so persistent. But mostly he was scared that Trent would die before he could apologize to both Trent and Kim for being so

pigheaded.

Trini squeezed his shoulder and she and Rocky left the room with Jason and Billy. Tommy eased into the chair next to the bed. In all the time he had known Kim, he had never really had the chance to observe her while she slept. He marveled at how similar Drew and Kim were and how much Drew favored both Trent and Kim. It was obvious how much of a family they really were. How had he been blind to that?

"Kim, I'm so sorry for all the pain you've been through."

Kim shifted in the bed and slowly opened her eyes. She looked around, for a moment unsure where she was. Then she noticed Drew in her arms and smiled. Kissing the toddler's head she looked over at Tommy. "When did Drew get here?"

"About ten or twenty minutes ago. He missed you."

Kim raised the bed a little higher. "I missed him as well. The two of us have at least shared a room every night since we left the clinic. Lately, he's even been sleeping the same bed. I never thought I would miss him kicking me all night. Any word on Trent?"

Tommy shook his head. "Nothing new. You still have about an hour before visiting time. Do you want something to eat?"

"No, thanks. Billy and Jason practically force-fed me my breakfast before I gave blood. Tommy, what's going on with Donavon?"

"Don't worry about him, Kim. We aren't going to let him near you or Drew again. Bulk and Skull have given their word that he wasn't going to be released."

Kim shifted Drew's weight a little. "I was surprised to see them there."

"They were responsible for us finding you so quickly. They traced Donavon's credit card purchases to find out he had rented that boat shack. They've changed a lot since getting back on the police force."

Kim glanced back down at Drew. "I guess we all grow up some time."

Tommy reached over and lightly caressed her cheek. "It just takes some of us longer than others. I'm sorry for the way I acted yesterday. I love you and I want you to be happy, even if being with Trent is what makes you happy.'

Tears welled up in her eyes once more. "Do you mean that or are you just saying that because you think Trent is going to die?"

"Kim, Iâ€¢!"

She shook her head. "No, Tommy. I know that sounds really bad but I have to know. Because if you think you can, I don't know, give me your blessing now and wait until Trent is dead to swoop in and console me, it's not going to work. If Trent dies I don't want to live either. I will because Drew needs me and I love him too much to

abandon him. But if Trent dies and I live to be a hundred I will never fall in love again."

"I really mean it, Kim. Actually, I probably knew it from the night I watched you and Trent dancing but I couldn't admit it to myself. Trent is going to make it, Kim. I just know he is. You two are going to get married and raise Drew, have kids of your own, the works."

Our lifetimes are made for years. Kim smiled. "You're right. Thanks. I'm sorry for what I said. I have no excuse except that I'm so worried about Trent."

Tommy shook his head. "Don't think about it. Why don't I go find someone and see about you getting released? By then, it will be just about time for you to see Trent."

Kim squeezed Trent's hand tightly. "You can wake up any time now. Drew wants to see his Daddy but they won't let him back here."

Trent remained unresponsive, lying there in the hospital bed. The doctors had removed the tube from his mouth but he was still hooked to various monitors. Kim suppressed a shudder.

"This isn't fair, you know. I can't handle sickness or injury the way you can. I'm useless when it comes to playing nurse. Remember all those times you had to take Drew to the pediatrician for his shots because I couldn't stand to see the doctor hurt him? This is even harder than that."

Kim glanced at the wall clock. She knew the nurse would be running her out in a few minutes. There was so much she wanted to tell him, things that would reassure him that everything would be okay.

"Donavon is in jail so I don't think we have to worry about anything. If his dad comes and tries to cause trouble about who Drew belongs to, I'll get one of the guys to take him out of town until you are able to travel. I hope it doesn't come to that because I don't want to be away from either of you."

"Miss Hart, time is up. You can come back at two." The nurse smiled at Kim while checking the monitors.

Kim nodded even though she hated that she couldn't stay. "How's he doing?"

"His vitals are stable but his condition is still serious. We won't be able to say for certain that he's out of danger until he wakes up. We are doing everything we can for your fiancÃ©."

"Can't you give me something better than that?"

"I'm afraid not. Why don't you go and relax for a little while. We'll let you know if there are any changes."

Reluctantly, Kim left the small cubicle. As she walked down the hall to join her friends she discovered that she didn't feel all that much better than when she had left his side the first time.

In the waiting room, Drew ran to her as soon as she stepped inside. She swung him up in her arms and hugged him tightly. "Hey Slugger."

"Dada?"

"Daddy's asleep right now. You can see him soon, I hope." She looked around the room. With the exception of Billy, Jason, and Kat, all of her friends were there. She blinked back tears. For the past two years, she had had only Trent to lean on when things became difficult. She had almost forgotten what it was like to have such an abundance of support. Kim didn't know how she would get through this without them.

Trini put an arm around her shoulder. "Why don't you come back to Jason's with us. We can leave the number at the desk for them to call you if there's any change."

Kim shook her head. "No, I don't think so. Even if I can't be in the room with him, I want to be as close as I can."

"Kim, it can't be good for you to stay here all the time." Tanya argued. "Trent wouldn't want you to sit around here all day."

"Maybe not but he'd do it for me. I can't ask anything less from myself." Drew wiggled in her arms and she set him down. She was glad to see that he didn't seem to be suffering from what had happened. How wonderful the way kids bounced back. "But there's no sense in all of you staying."

Zack grinned. "Hey, no way. If you are staying, we are staying. That's what friends are for."

Kim kissed his cheek. "Thanks, I appreciate that but really it isn't necessary. You didn't come all this way to sit around here holding my hand."

Adam shook his head. "You're right in a way. We came here to have a reunion and that's what we are doing. So quit worrying about what we are doing. You've got enough to do worrying about Trent. Let us worry about everything else. Okay?"

Kim willed back the tears. Once again she was glad that she was surrounded by such good friends. "Okay, if all of you are sure. I can't tell you what all of you have done for me means."

"You do the same for us."

"Mama!" Drew came running back to her and jumped up in her arms. "Outside, play."

Kim ruffled his hair. No matter how little sleep he got, he was always ready to go strong the next day. She had long since learned how to push her own fatigue aside to keep up with him. One look at Rocky, who had appointed himself Drew's chief baby-sitter, told her he hadn't developed that skill.

"Oh, Sweety, maybe later. Go easy on these guys, how about it? They don't run off those pink bunny batteries like you do."

"Pink bunny batteries, no wonder I can't keep up with him." Rocky joked back. "Kim, why don't you switch those batteries for some less potent ones?"

He was pleased to see her smile. She swung Drew around in her arms, making the toddler giggle. "I would if I could, believe me."

Trini recognized the look on Kim's face. She had seen it plenty of times while Kim's parents were going through their divorce. It was the look that said Kim was only going through the motions of every day life for the benefit of others. Inside she was emotionally dying. Trini didn't know how long Kim would be able to keep up the act.

"Kim, would you like for a few of us to take Drew back to Jason's? That way you don't have to worry about him getting restless around here."

Kim smiled gratefully. "That would be great but I hate to put him off on all of you. You've done so much already."

Aisha shook her head. "Think nothing of it. We wouldn't have it any other way. Besides, Drew is an angel."

Tommy noticed the way Kim stiffened at the word angel. He recalled that Trent would call her Angel. He would give anything to take her pain away.

Finally it was decided that Rocky, Trini, Aisha and Zack would take Drew back to Jason's. Tommy, Adam and Tanya would stay with Kim at the hospital. They tried to make Kim promise to go back to Jason's as well after the two o'clock visit but Kim wouldn't make any guarantees.

Around eleven, Adam and Tanya left the waiting room to run down to the cafeteria. It was their hope that they could then convince Kim to go with Tommy to eat lunch upon their return. They hadn't been gone ten minutes when Kat entered the waiting room. She looked around, a bit uncomfortable.

Spotting Kim staring out the window, Kat took a deep breath and joined her. Tommy watched them silently from the couch. "Kim?" Kat began tentatively.

Kim glanced at the blonde before looking back out the window. "Hey, Kat; you didn't have to come."

Kat hung her head. "I know and I wasn't but Bulk and Skull called from the police department. They really need you to come down to the station and make your statement. Apparently, Donavon's father has arrived and is making a lot of noise about getting Donavon released. The department wants all the necessary paperwork so the DA has no choice but to keep him."

Kim rubbed her arms absently. As much as she wanted to stay near Trent, she wanted Donavon behind bars just as badly. "Okay, let's get it over with. I hate to ask but can you give me a ride? I don't trust my reflexes right now behind the wheel of a car."

Kat gave her a slight smile. "Sure, I have Jason's car

downstairs."

"Let me tell Tommy."

"Tell me what?" Tommy joined the two girls.

"I have to go the station and make my statement. Will you stay here in case there's any change?"

"Sure. How can I get in touch with you if we need you?"

Looking around, Kim scooped up a pen and piece of paper from a nearby table and scribbled a number on it. She handed the paper to Tommy.

"Here's my pager number. Call me if there is any change."

Kim waited until they were in the car on their way to the station before saying anything directly to Kat. "I appreciate this. I know I'm not your favorite person."

"Why didn't you tell us the truth about Drew?" Kat didn't take her eyes off the road.

"It was the best thing for Drew's sake."

"But not for you. Kim, when I think about the things I said to you the other night. I was so cruel and hateful."

"No, you were upset and hurt. You were speaking your mind. I don't blame you for being mad or avoiding me."

"Kim, I haven't been avoiding you today because I'm mad at you. I figured you hated me for those horrible things I said."

Kim laughed to avoid crying again. "Kat, I don't hate you because that. You are my friend; I could never hate you. I'll admit there was a time that I wanted to hate you. I hated the fact that while my life was turning upside down, you had my powers and probably my boyfriend. Even though I had given Tommy up, I didn't want anyone else to have him. Pretty selfish, huh?"

"Maybe a little, but you were going through so much. I probably would have hated me too. What's going on with you and Tommy now?"

Kim sighed. "You were right about Tommy still having feelings for me but he knows now that there can never be anything more between him. Give him a little time to get over the hurt but don't let him get away a second time. You two deserve to be happy."

Kat pulled into the closet space she could find at the Police station and turned to face Kim. "You really think we have a chance?"

Kim smiled. "Yeah. Now let's get this over with."

It only took her twenty minutes to make her statement. Emotionally drained, Kim left the interrogation room. Bulk, Skull and Kat were

waiting for her in the hallway. "You okay, Kim?"

"I will be once this is all over with and Trent is okay and Donavon is rotting under some jail cell."

"How is Trent?"

Kim shrugged. "The doctor and nurses won't tell me too much. I want them to tell me he's going to be okay, even if it's a lie. So, what's going to happen to Donavon?"

Bulk smiled. "He's going to rot under the jail. And that's no lie. The DA has taken an intense dislike to both Donavon and his father. So, he's pressing the case hard. You don't have to worry about either of them bothering you again. Skull and I will see to that. And you know the two of us when we get something in our heads."

Kim thought about all the times Bulk and Skull had tried to discover the Ranger's identities and had to smile. If they were looking out for her then she would be okay. The pager on her waist vibrated. Her heart beating wildly, she glanced down at the readout.

**

Kim, return to the hospital as soon as possible.

**

** **

** ** Kim rushed into the hospital with Kat, Bulk and Skull right on her heels. She bypassed the waiting room all together and headed straight back to the ICU. Turning the corner, her heart skipped a beat when she saw that Trent's bed was empty. As she was about to hit the floor, Tommy caught her.

"Easy, Kim, I'll take you to him."

Her legs were the consistency of jelly as she allowed Tommy to lead her across the corridor to a different set of cubicles in another unit. He took her right past several doctors and nurses and led her into a large cubicle. Kim's eyes were downcast; she wasn't ready to face what she might see.

"Hey Kimber. I missed you."

Kim looked up, stunned to see Trent smiling at her from the bed. The bed had been raised to where he was almost sitting up. He looked weak and pale but at least he was awake. For a moment, she just stared at him, tears streaming down her face.

"Don't cry, Angel. I'm okay."

As if suddenly freed from the temporary paralysis that had kept her rooted in place, Kim rushed forward and hugged him tightly. "Thank God! I was so scared. When you weren't in your room, I just knew something bad had happened." She glanced back long enough to glare at Tommy. "Don't you ever scare me like that again."

Tommy looked sheepish. "I'm sorry, Kim. I was going to tell you he was awake but the phone cut off before I could finish. I didn't mean to scare you."

Kim was too relieved to stay upset. She stared at Trent as if scared that he would suddenly disappear if she took her eyes off him. Trent reached up and tenderly wiped away her tears with his thumbs. "Are you okay, Kimber? Did Donavon hurt you?"

Fresh tears formed in Kim's eyes. Neither Trent nor Kim realized the others had left the room to give them privacy. "I'm fine thanks to you. You never should have jumped in front of me like that. What were you thinking?"

"That Donavon was about to take away yet another person that I loved more than anything. I was thinking that if he succeeded, my life wouldn't be worth living without you. No matter what happens between us, I can handle it as long as you are okay and happy."

"I've been thinking the same thing. But, Honey, the only thing that is going to happen between us is a lifetimes of happy years together."

"You meant that?" Trent asked. His voice was getting fainter and it was obvious the conversation was draining him.

"More than I have ever meant anything else I have ever said. But we've got time to plan the rest of our lives. For now, get some rest."

"Will you stay?"

Kim kissed him lightly on the lips. "Let them try to run me out of here."

"Then climb up here in bed with me."

Kim wanted nothing more than to do just that but she hesitated. "I don't want to hurt you."

"The only way you could do that is to walk out of my life."

Kim eased up on the bed beside him and rested her head on his shoulder. She was careful not to jar any of his wounds. "That's something you won't ever have to worry about."

**

Epilogue

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"If anyone one can find just cause why these two should not be married, let him speak now or forever hold his peace."

Nobody in the small church said a word as the man in the white tuxedo and the woman in the beautiful wedding gown pledged their love to each other. The minister smiled. "Then by the power vested in me, I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride."

Tommy Oliver smiled as he lifted Kat's veil and tenderly kissed her. As the congregation applauded, the newly married couple marched down the aisle arm in arm. Directly behind them, Trent Connerey grinned at his very pregnant wife and took her arm as they followed the couple out.

In the vestibule of the church, Trent took Kim in his arms and kissed her. "It doesn't seem like it's been almost a year since we made that trip, does it?"

Kim grinned. "Only when I look in the mirror and see how fat I've gotten. Let's go rescue my mom from our son and wish Tommy and Kat well."

As they made their way to the reception hall, Kim thought about all the changes that had occurred in just a year's time. Trent and Kim had decided to make Angel Grove their permanent home. Her parents had finally met Trent and Drew. Her mom had been so delighted to finally know the truth that she and her husband had moved back to Angel Grove as well so she could be near her grandson. Kim and Trent had married in the same church where Kat and Tommy had just said their own vows.

Donavon had been found guilty of assault, kidnapping, and attempted murder and was currently serving a life sentence at the State Penitentiary. Judge Black had tried unsuccessfully to get custody of Drew but the judge that heard the case ruled that he didn't have sufficient proof to refute Kim and Trent's claim to parentage. The nightmare was passed them and they were really and truly happy.

Inside the reception hall, Kim noticed that Rocky and Aisha were dancing with Drew on the dance floor. When Drew saw Kim and Trent enter, he ran toward them and jumped up into Kim's arms. As she caught him, a hard cramp rippled across her stomach.

Kim groaned. It was the third such cramp that she had had since the beginning of the wedding. She believed she knew what was happening. Handing Drew over to Trent, she kissed his cheek. "I'm going to go speak to Kat and Tommy. Why don't you go ask Mom if she's ready to keep Drew for a couple of days."

Trent's eyes grew wide. "Is it time? Are youâ€¦?"

Kim nodded. "Yeah, but relax; we have plenty of time."

Trent kissed her again before going off to find his mother-in-law. He stopped along the way to tell all of their friends what was going on. Kim smiled and headed toward the food table where Kat and Tommy were feeding each other cake. "Hey guys, congratulations." She hugged them both.

Tommy smiled. "Thanks. We're glad you and Trent stood up for us."

Kat nodded as she leaned her head on Tommy's shoulder. "Yes and we're glad that someone didn't decide to come early so you could."

Kim winced as another contraction hit her. Her hand was on her lower

back, gently massaging the tight muscles. "Yeah, well I think the wedding got over just in time though. It looks like it's going to be a great party and I'm sorry that Trent and I aren't going to be able to stay, butâ€|"

Kat squeezed her hand. "You're in labor?"

Kim nodded. "Trent's getting Drew settled and then we are on our way to the hospital."

"We'll come as soon as the guests clear out."

"No you will not. You two have tickets to Hawaii. I don't want you to miss your honeymoon."

Tommy hugged her again. "We won't but we can't leave until we know about you and the baby. We'll see you in a little bit. Good luck."

"Thanks." Kim smiled as Trent appeared at her side, his arms around her waist.

"Ready, Angel? Sorry, we're cutting out so early butâ€|."

"Don't worry about it. Go take care of her and that baby."

Five hours later, Trent stepped into the waiting room. All the former Rangers were there, having flown in to attend the wedding. Ernie, Bulk, Skull, Drew, and Kim's parents were also sitting around the couches. They all looked up as Trent entered the room. He looked tired but happy.

"It's a girl. A wonderful seven pounds, twelve ounces little girl who is every bit as beautiful as her mother." Everyone cheered and hugged each other. Rocky and Zack even high-fived each other.

"How's Kim?" Mr. Hart wanted to know.

"She's great. She's too happy to even be exhausted or in pain. She wants you all to see the baby but only a few at a time. She of course wants Drew back there now but she also asked that Kat and Tommy go first if you were still here."

"She's more worried about our honeymoon than we are." Tommy laughed.

Trent scooped Drew up and led the newlyweds down the hall to Kim's room. The new mother was sitting up in the bed staring at the small bundle in her arms, a soft smile on her lips.

"Mama." Drew called out happily.

"Hey, Slugger. Come meet your little sister."

Drew's eyes lit up as the baby moved in Kim's arms. "Baby. My baby."

"Our baby, Slugger, she's our baby." Kim glanced over at Kat and Tommy. "You two should be almost to Hawaii by now."

Tommy shrugged. "We'll take a later flight. There's no way we would have missed this."

Kat took the baby from Kim and held her close. "Oh, Kim, Trent, she's just beautiful. Have you decided on a name?"

"Erin Ann Connerey." Kim supplied. "She's named after her parents and the aunt Andi."

"Besides Erin being the female spelling of my middle name, it was Andi's middle name as well. Of course you know that Ann is Kim's middle name."

"That's lovely." Kat returned the baby to Kim.

Kim stifled a yawn but the newlyweds saw it. Tommy leaned down and kissed Kim's cheek. "You get some rest. We'll come see you when we get back next week."

Kim nodded sleepily, the baby clutched protectively to her. "You two have a great trip. Send my parents back okay?"

"Okay." Kat and Tommy said their good-byes to Trent and Drew and slipped out of the room. Now that the family was alone Trent kissed Kim.

"Well, Mrs. Connerey, you're a mother once again. How does it feel?"

"Wonderful. I just hope I learned something the first time."

"Drew and Erin are lucky to have you as a mother. I'm pretty lucky, too. I love you, Kimberly Ann Connerey."

"And I love you, Trent Aaron Connerey. You know, I bet Andi is really smiling right now. When she was alive, she just wanted us to be friends. I bet she never thought we would end up this happy together."

"Was it worth all the pain to get to this point?" Trent asked tenderly.

Kim looked from the child she had raised from birth to the baby to whom she had just given birth and finally to the man she had pledged to love for the rest of her life. "I don't regret a single day of my life or a single choice I've made."

THE END

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